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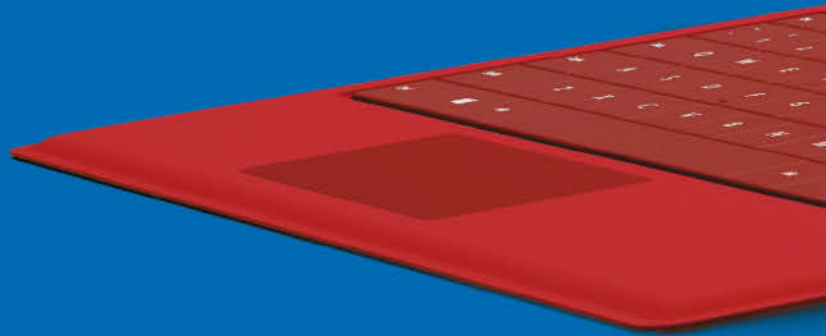
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TRAINING TEACHERS

James Surowiecki, in his piece on advances in sports training, asserts that the biggest problem with public education in the United States is that, as a culture, we are too married to the romantic idea of the natural-born teacher and therefore do not feel the need to invest seriously in teacher training, as countries like Finland have done ("Better All the Time," November 10th). But there is a more fundamental problem. America's political leaders, attempting to improve student performance without increasing school funding, have implemented a barrage of standardized tests that hamstring teachers and dull students' ability to think critically and creatively. The most rigorously trained teacher in the world is hardly a match for the stultifying necessity of teaching to the tests in overpopulated, underfunded classrooms full of students who, quite rightfully, do not see any intrinsic value in mindless memorization. If we truly want a smarter populace, we have to end common-core testing, along with the shameful tactic of reducing funding, based on poor test scores, to the schools that need it the most.

*Marianna Ritchey
Northampton, Mass.*

BEEFEATER

Dana Goodyear, in her piece about Anya Fernald and her work at the meat company Belcampo, in California, asks the question "Is it possible to eat meat without guilt?" ("Elite Meat," November 3rd). Judging by the description of Belcampo, the answer is yes, but not for reasons that are specific to Fernald's business alone. Many of the processes that Goodyear describes are standard practice across the meat industry, but on a larger scale. For instance, about half of the cattle in the United States and Canada are handled at facilities

designed by Temple Grandin, and at least ninety-five per cent of the country's meat is produced in plants that follow her guidelines and animal-welfare program. The aim of the meat industry is to use every part of the animal, whether it's high-demand cuts of steak; trimmings for hamburgers, hot dogs, and sausages; or hides for leather products or byproducts that can be used for animal feed, fuel, fertilizer, or even pharmaceuticals.

*James H. Hodges
President and C.E.O., American
Meat Institute
Washington, D.C.*

Belcampo may be trying to distance itself from the negative image of animal agriculture, but, from what I read in Goodyear's article, it's the same old song and dance. One need look no further than the C.E.O. Anya Fernald's snakeskin shoes, leather jacket, and penchant for eating every animal that moves, to get a sense of how she feels about animal welfare. Even the Belcampo Web site admits that the company's farmers separate calves from their mothers starting at eight months, and that they kill cows that are just two years of age. Goodyear reports seeing cows crammed together in a small paddock that is "delineated by an electric fence tufted with sheep wool." Meanwhile, Belcampo is contributing to global warming with the vast amounts of methane that its farmed animals produce. The farm also uses up huge amounts of water, land, and energy. The only "ethical" choice when it comes to meat is not to eat it.

*Michelle Kretzer
The PETA Foundation
Norfolk, Va.*

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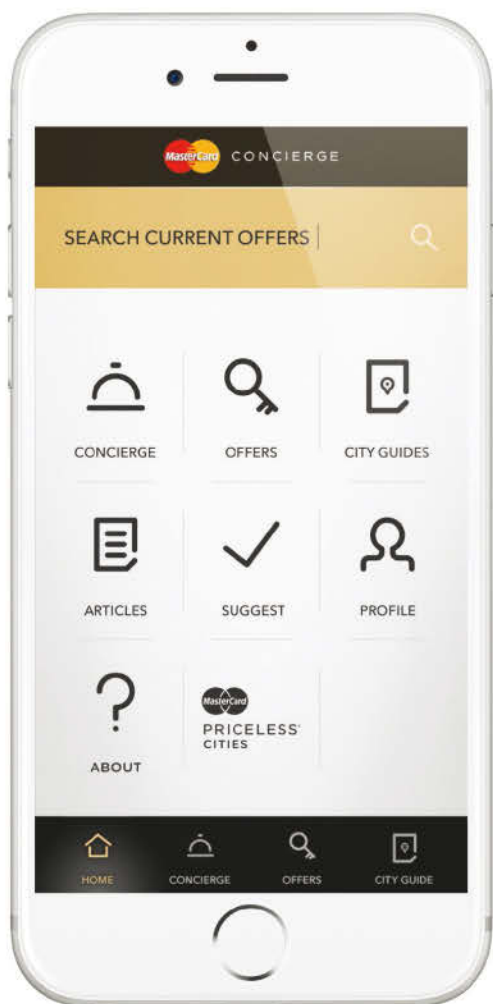
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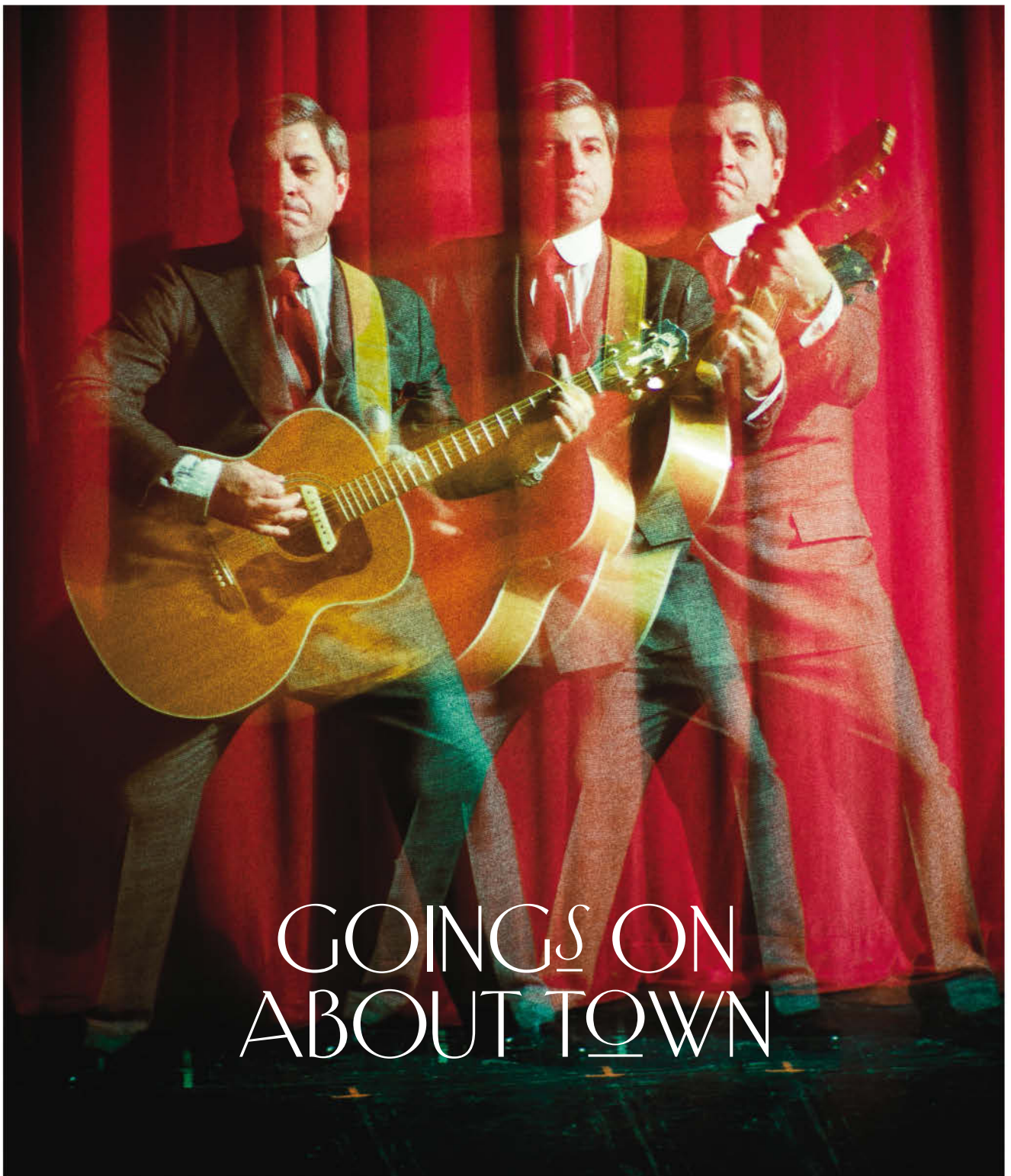
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

DECEMBER 2014 WEDNESDAY 3RD THURSDAY 4TH FRIDAY 5TH SATURDAY 6TH SUNDAY 7TH MONDAY 8TH TUESDAY 9TH

THERE'S A FREEWHEELING GENIUS to the work of Les Freres Corbusier. At first glance, the theatre troupe seems like a bunch of overeducated kids happily tramping about in the legacies of past Presidents ("President Harding Is a Rock Star," "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson") or religions ("A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant," "Hell House"), but there's usually a message that cuts through all that zany satire. Alex Timbers, who co-founded the group, in 2003, has gone on to direct big-budget shows like "Rocky," but he returns downtown with "Here's Hoover!," at Abrons Arts Center. The show, modelled on Elvis Presley's "Comeback Special," from 1968, has Herbert Hoover singing rueful rockabilly songs in an attempt to rise above his reputation as one of the worst Presidents in American history.

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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

A Christmas Memory

Irish Rep presents a musical adaptation of the Truman Capote story, set in 1955, with flashbacks to Alabama in 1933, about a young boy being raised by his eccentric relatives. In previews. Opens Dec. 4. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-727-2737.)

Here's Hoover! The Historic Herbert Hoover 2014 Comeback Special

The cheeky troupe Les Freres Corbusier has written a "comeback special" for the controversial thirty-first President, modelled on Elvis Presley's 1968 show. Written by Sean Cunningham, with songs by Michael Friedman. Alex Timbers directs. Opens Dec. 5. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101.)

Honeymoon in Vegas

Tony Danza, Rob McClure, and Brynn O'Malley star in Andrew Bergman and Jason Robert Brown's new musical, based on the 1992 movie. Gary Griffin directs. In previews. (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 866-870-2717.)

The Illusionists

Seven experts at legerdemain and all sorts of other tricks, physical and mental, perform a show on Broadway. The illusionists include the Manipulator (Yu Ho-Jin), the Anti-Conjuror (Dan Sperry), the Trickster (Jeff Hobson), and the Escapologist (Andrew Basso). In previews. Opens Dec. 4. (Marquis, Broadway at 46th St. 877-250-2929.)

The Invisible Hand

Ayad Akhtar ("Disgraced") wrote this play, in which an American banker is kidnapped in Pakistan. Ken Rus Schmoll directs. In previews. Opens Dec. 8. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-279-4200.)

Pocattello

Davis McCallum directs the world premiere of a new play by Samuel D. Hunter ("The Whale"), about the manager of an Italian chain restaurant in a changing city in Idaho. Starring T. R. Knight. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

Seven in One Blow, or the Brave Little Kid

Axis Theatre revives its holiday show, adapted from the Brothers Grimm fairy tale, about the journey of a boy on a snowy day. Randy Sharp

directs. Opens Dec. 5. (Axis Theatre, 1 Sheridan Sq. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

Asymmetric

A husband-and-wife spy team, broken apart by divorce, are brought together again when the wife (Kate Middleton) is suspected of selling highly classified material to the enemy, and the only person who might be able to get her to talk is her husband (Sean Williams), an ex-C.I.A. agent with low self-esteem and a major drinking problem. Though Mac Rogers's twisty love story is clever and well-acted, under the direction of Jordana Williams, it feels much more like a slick cable-TV show than like theatre. In the first twenty minutes, when the wife's finger is cut off by a sadistic torturer (Rob Maitner) with a pair of gardening shears, theatregoers who are not prepared for gratuitous violence might feel like changing the channel. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Dec. 6.)

A Delicate Balance

In Edward Albee's play, from 1966, Tobias (John Lithgow) and Agnes (Glenn Close) lost their only son, Teddy, many years ago. They already had a daughter, the quarrelsome Julia (Martha Plimpton). Agnes's sister, Claire (Lindsay Duncan), who lives with the couple, is a drunk who doesn't want to face the memory of the affairs that it is suggested she had with Tobias and with his friend Harry (Bob Balaban), who shows up with his wife, Edna (Clare Higgins), catching Agnes, Tobias, and Claire by surprise. The director, Pam MacKinnon, has Close speak so fast that we can't hear the transitions in her thoughts and feelings. The never less than empathy-inducing Lithgow is left up a creek with only a small bent spoon to paddle with. The alienation that these performers evoke is not the alienation of Albee's world, with its high talk and its Episcopalian doubt, but the chilly defensiveness of actors standing onstage, for the most part, alone together. Still, nothing can detract from the purity and force of Albee's writing. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/1/14.) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)

Suzan-Lori Parks is a sort of theatrical resurrectionist, forcing history's dead to life beneath the stage lights. For this triptych, the first part of an imagined nine-play sequence, she encamps in the early years of the Civil War, following Hero (a stoic Sterling K. Brown), a slave who fights on the Confederate side. As ever, Parks's language is sumptuous and precise, almost Elizabethan in its rhythms. But, under Jo Bonney's direction, some of the drama, which deliberately echoes the Odyssey, feels

strangely abstracted, the suffering of the characters revealed at some remove. Yet in Part 2, "A Battle in the Wilderness," Hero's desperate ambivalence seems immediate and wrenching. A Yank soldier (Louis Cancelmi) urges him toward freedom. "We won't have a price," he says. "That'll be the beauty of it." Hero can only ask, "Where's the beauty in not being worth nothing?" (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through Dec. 7.)

Me, My Mouth & I

This one-woman show by Joy Behar, the ex-co-host of "The View," is not so much theatre as it is ninety minutes of standup, in which Behar tells the story of her life in jokes. Like the one about how her Brooklyn upbringing left her more Jewish than Italian, the one about how her first marriage made her miss the sexual revolution, and the one about how she broke a promise to her boss, Barbara Walters, while shopping for swag at the Emmys, and Walters fired her. Behar, who came to show business relatively late in life, has a good story to tell, and the famous old West Village theatre where she tells it is a much more comfortable place to sit and listen than a noisy, boozy comedy club. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111.)

Our Lady of Kibeho

With her ninth full-length play, the thirty-three-year-old writer Katori Hall is emerging as a major American voice. Set in Rwanda in 1981, the story covers a year in the lives of several girls at a Catholic school in the beautiful, segregated village of Kibeho. There, the Virgin Mary visits Alphonsine, Anathalie, and Marie-Claire (played well by Nneka Okafor, Mandi Masden, and Joaquina Kalukango). She wants to love them in a blood-soaked land. Initially incredulous, the girls' various keepers (as Sister Evangelique, Starla Benford is especially fine) start to question their own beliefs as the Virgin Mary shows signs of her power in the girls' dormitories, and by arranging nature a little differently. When Father Flavia (the wonderful T. Ryder Smith) turns up to case the joint, his faith is challenged, too. There are a lot of influences here, from Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" to William Friedkin's "The Exorcist," and, with the support of Michael Greif, the director, Hall has produced a show that balances the poetic with the grotesque as beautifully as she balances the comedic with the sad. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)

Dread is right: Sam Shepard's take on "Oedipus Rex" rarely lets up on the foreboding, egged on by a groaning cello and slide guitar.

The set (by Frank Conway) is all sickly white tiles, increasingly smeared with blood and guts. The play originated with the Northern Irish company Field Day, and the director, Nancy Meckler, mixes actors from both continents. The result is a mishmash of settings and tones, pieced together in short, cryptic scenes. A chilly Jocasta monologue delivered in Irish brogue is followed by something more Shepard-esque: two detectives examining a roadside murder scene in the American southwest. The disjointed quality seems purposeful, but the play might have had more gruesome power if Shepard had committed to a slant or a style. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

Punk Rock

Nuclear war frightens Lilly (Colby Minifie), a new student at a posh private school in Stockport, England. She also fears "black people, dogs, most dogs, some birds, farm animals, sexual assault." Before Simon Stephens's play closes, she'll have new terrors to top the list. Set in a dingy linoleum-lined library, this volatile exploration of adolescence, produced by MCC, converges on seven students in their final year—each a precarious mix of impulse, hormones, and dread. Under Trip Cullman's direction, the young cast (with an assist from the Off Broadway icon David Greenspan) gives fervent, kinetic performances. Will Pullen is particularly fine as a bully with his own vulnerabilities, and Douglas Smith is quite good as an unpredictable outsider. Sometimes you can feel the playwright nudging the characters toward the alarming climax, but it's still a shock when it arrives. "We all get scared," Lilly insists. Yes, audiences, too. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101.)

The River

Jez Butterworth is a writer who likes to imply or leave out what's important to his characters. This can work when he has enough of a story to hang his silences on, but in this, his sixth full-length play, the subtleties subsume the story, so that what we're left with is not something we can care much about—or find interesting. The Man (Hugh Jackman, hunky in a tight T-shirt and wading boots) has a cabin in the woods where he likes to fish with any number of partners, women, mostly, who react to the sameness of his verbal lovemaking with various repetitions, sometimes defensive, of their own. The Woman (Cush Jumbo) alternates with The Other Woman (Laura Donnelly) to show the fakery in love, the fiction of being, and one's emotional interiority as the ultimate truth. Relying on their acting skills—all the actors have good strong chops—to fill in what Butterworth hasn't written can't rescue what isn't there, but they're all nice to look at, at least for a time. (Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

Self Made Man: The Frederick Douglass Story

Phil Darius Wallace has written and performed one-man shows about Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Richard Wright, and Langston Hughes, and now he takes on Frederick Douglass, the nineteenth-century slave who taught himself to read and write, escaped slavery, and went on to become a leader in the abolitionist movement. Under the direction of the show's co-creator, Melania Levitsky, Wallace sings, dances, and plays fourteen significant characters in Douglass's life, including his grandmother, his owner-father, and President Abraham Lincoln. There's something about the low-tech quality of this production that

makes it seem more educational than artful, but Wallace's full-on commitment to the material is nonetheless admirable and charming. (ArcLight, 152 W. 71st St. 212-352-3101.)

Side Show

A black man can't catch a break, not even in a freak show. Jake (the mighty actor and singer David St. Louis) is called on to be protective of Violet and Daisy Hilton (Erin Davie and Emily Padgett, respectively), conjoined twins who are the star attractions in a carniesideshow run by the oily Sir (Robert Joy), in the late nineteen-twenties. Jake is a strong man with a strong voice whose freakishness is confined to his race. There are some startling lyrics by Bill Russell, who also wrote the book, set to Henry Krieger's serviceable score. As the moral conscience in an unconscionable world, Jake must bear the burden of the Hilton sisters' shyness and sadness when he declares his love toward the end of the musical—a love that cannot be reciprocated, given the times. All of this is fine in a perfectly reasonable, predictable show. The best reason to see it, though, is for St. Louis and Davie and Padgett, who not only respect their characters but love them. Directed by Bill Condon. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

Tamburlaine, Parts I and II

The great Shakespearean actor John Douglas Thompson is riveting in this gorgeous Theatre for a New Audience production of Christopher Marlowe's 1587 antiwar drama, about a shepherd so brutal and ambitious that he manages to conquer half the world. But Thompson is almost upstaged by the other main character in this epic:

blood. For three hours, stage blood is tossed from buckets, painted across necks, and spilled from wineglasses—it even rains down a huge, clear plastic curtain that spans the back of the otherwise empty stage. Mercifully, the director, Michael Boyd—once the artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company—keeps stage fighting to a minimum, so the many murders that make up the plot are gentler than they could have been. Audiences get a visceral sense of tyranny from this inspired production, stunningly punctuated with percussion by the composer Arthur Solari. (Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.)

Tristan & Yseult

A show for wallflowers and shrinking violets, cold fish and wet blankets. Kneehigh, the theatre company that created the ultraromantic "Brief Encounter," returns with a chic, skeptical version of the Arthurian legend, set in the Club of the Unloved (a seedy nightclub with a fifties-London vibe) and narrated by a chorus of anorak-clad lonely hearts. These loveless souls witness the familiar tale: King Mark dispatches with the valiant Tristan (Dominic Marsh, accented and appressed like a nouvelle-vague star) to fetch fair Yseult (the doll-like Hannah Vassallo). Tristan and Yseult, assisted by a potion and some aerial rigging, fall in love and into bed. The director, Emma Rice, and the playwrights, Carl Grose and Anna Maria Murphy, are less interested in these lovers than in the story's spurned supernumeraries—Mark, the maid Brangian, Tristan's neglected wife. The show, if arch and indulgent, is superbly stylish and theatrical. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 29 Jay St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

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Altman's twenty-eighth feature stars Tim Robbins as a studio executive alongside Greta Scacchi.

HATE THE GAME

"The Player" leads a complete Robert Altman retrospective at MOMA.

IN THE OPENING SHOT OF "The Player," from 1992, Robert Altman makes an explicit attempt to outdo Orson Welles's famous opening to "Touch of Evil." He has the camera zoom in and out, track left and right, pan one way and the other, and, before a cut finally comes, pick up with most of the major characters of the film. The scene also situates "The Player"—a movie about a studio created on a Hollywood studio lot—in film history, with passing references to silent film, forties genre work, the sixties, and, finally, the Japanese, who were then moving in on Hollywood, and are seen looking the studio over. When it came out, "The Player" was regarded as a scorching attack on greedy and unimaginative Hollywood: in the film, the industry's shining past surrounds the executives at the studio and shames many of them. Twenty years later, the huge profits from big-Hollywood movies—digital fantasies based on comic books and video games—have washed away that shame. The executives in "The Player" have stories pitched to them constantly by writers, and then they say yes or no. They don't consult the marketing division on what will sell in Bangkok and in Bangalore. The thing that Altman may not have anticipated was that one would be able to look back at the world of "The Player" with something almost like nostalgia.



MOVIES

Altman's "hero," Griffin Mill—a corrupt but likable studio executive, played by Tim Robbins, in double-breasted Italian suits—receives threatening messages from a disgruntled screenwriter, written on movie-memorabilia postcards. What follows is an intricate story of murder, deception, and ruthless game-playing, in which Altman recapitulates and extends his expressive innovations of the seventies: the overlapping dialogue, the alternating planes of interest, the almost offhand emotional violence, the needling wit.

"The Player," which is the twenty-eighth of Altman's thirty-seven features, is part of a stupendous MOMA retrospective running from Dec. 3 through Jan. 17. It was made at a time when Altman was seriously out of fashion in Hollywood. "M*A*S*H" had erupted two decades earlier, "Nashville" in 1975. By the late eighties, Altman couldn't get financing for regular features, so he adapted plays ("Fool for Love" and "Beyond Therapy") and made TV movies ("The Laundromat" and "Basements"), as well as a revolutionary TV series about politics ("Tanner '88"). Working independently, he brought off a suggestive and elliptical biopic of Vincent van Gogh and his brother ("Vincent & Theo"), which was virtually unseen. All these works, and everything else—the early features, the TV work, music videos, industrial shorts, and documentary pieces—are included in the MOMA retrospective, in which the acrid and brilliant "Player" has a pivotal role.

—David Denby

NOW PLAYING

The Babadook

The title refers to a monster, top-hatted and sharp-clawed, who appears when his name is chanted three times, and who, like the worst kind of house guest, shows no desire to leave. The house in question is a small Australian dwelling, where the colors are so muted that the whole film appears, at times, to be willing itself into a state of black-and-white. Before the creature arrives, the sole inhabitants are the widowed Amelia (Essie Davis) and her young son, Samuel (Noah Wiseman), a demanding soul who fashions homemade weapons and deprives Amelia of sleep. Only by a whisker can Jennifer Kent's absorbing movie—adapted from an earlier short of hers, "Monster"—be considered a horror film. There is no lack of shocks, especially in the frantic final act, but they spring from some of our most common and insoluble complaints: insomnia, loneliness, the burdens of childcare, and the intolerable weight of grief. As a bonus, we get a fine burst of stop-motion animation; the Babadook first appears in the pages of a book, like all the best frighteners, and never looks back.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/1/14.) (In limited release.)

Beyond the Lights

The writer and director Gina Prince-Bythewood's tale of public success and private despair has the elements of a classic backstage story, but they don't quite crystallize into an integral drama. Gugu Mbatha-Raw plays Noni, a young British R. & B. singer working in the United States and perched on the brink of stardom. Kaz (Nate Parker), a quiet and polished Los Angeles police officer, rescues her from a suicide attempt and then, to the dismay of Noni's domineering mother (Minnie Driver), romance blossoms. Meanwhile, Kaz feels pressure from his father (Danny Glover), who has been grooming him to run for office. The film offers an intriguing look at the tense crafting of personae by pop stars and politicians alike: behind-the-scenes meetings with cold-blooded executives and gimlet-eyed clergymen, the careful management of aggressively prowling paparazzi and interviewers in mainstream media. The process, however, is primarily a backdrop. The plot pivots on Noni's yearning for authenticity beyond her flashy and hypersexualized public image, but the character and her aspirations are flattened into clichés. Mbatha-Raw hits all the right notes but lacks the force of personality. With Machine Gun Kelly as Kid Culpit, Noni's musical collaborator.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

Foxcatcher

A true story, and one that's more worryingly strange than any Marvel could dream up. Two muscular brothers, Mark and Dave Schultz

(Channing Tatum and Mark Ruffalo), each of whom has an Olympic gold medal for wrestling, are approached and recruited by John du Pont (Steve Carell), who has incalculable wealth, all of it inherited, and a sinister passion for wrestling. Mark is keener than Dave, but both eventually succumb. Their patron offers to house them, train them, and fund them, together with a squad of their fellow-fighters; his motives include a longing for national glory, an awkward suppression of sexual drives, and a pitiful wish to please his elderly mother (Vanessa Redgrave)—who considers wrestling a "low sport," and prefers horses. The director, Bennett Miller, wants the tale to tell home truths about money and ambition in America, and the disabling effects of both. Whether it has quite as much to say as he hopes—whether John, for instance, might be just a one-off weirdo—is open to debate, but there is no doubting the dramatic pressure that Miller wields and builds. The result is solemn to a fault, low of light and mood, carefully photographed by Greig Fraser, with performances of a matching intensity. There are comic chances here, but even Carell spurns most of them, despite being armed with a formidable false nose.—*A.L.* (11/17/14) (In limited release.)

Happy Valley

Amir Bar-Lev's mesmerizing documentary about the child-abuse scandal at Pennsylvania State University evokes and interprets (through the juxtaposition of interviews and other footage) the atmosphere in State College that allowed Jerry Sandusky, Penn State's assistant coach for decades, to prey on young boys—and to continue doing so even after his activities were known to university officials, including his boss, Joe Paterno, the head coach. As Bar-Lev demonstrates, the coaches were given a quasi-religious sanctification by a community enthralled by football. And, after Sandusky and Paterno leave, the community quickly becomes enthralled again. The film features an extensive interview with Matt Sandusky, who describes how Jerry Sandusky rescued him from poverty, adopted him, and then gradually seduced him. Married and with four children, Matt Sandusky has survived a betrayal beyond compare. Many of the other interviewees, who are mainly impatient for the scandal to pass, are not as admirable.—*David Denby* (11/24/14) (In limited release.)

The Homesman

Tommy Lee Jones directs and stars in a new Western; its direction of travel is easterly, however, and the pioneering spirit is all but snuffed out. He plays a ne'er-do-well named George Briggs, saved from the gallows by a dauntless spinster, Mary Bee Cuddy (Hilary Swank), who needs a helper as she drives a wagon to Hebron, Iowa. Her cargo consists of three wives driven

insane by conditions in the Nebraska Territory, where crops have failed and children have died. From these bleak elements, Jones has fashioned a typically patient piece of work; as in "The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada" (2005), he finds time for patches of genuine whimsy, as well as for narrative twists designed not for the sake of cleverness but in tribute to the cussedness of fate. The poor madwomen are given almost no voice at all, yet female presences dominate the film; Meryl Streep has a finely judged cameo toward the end, while Swank—who, as usual, has waited a few quiet years before delivering another performance of true grit—is evidently made of tougher stuff than the men around her.—*A.L.* (11/17/14) (In limited release.)

The Imitation Game

Alan Turing (Benedict Cumberbatch), recruited into service at the start of the Second World War, presents himself at a house in the British countryside. His manner is intolerant, his demeanor is a parody of the donnish, and his task is to crack the codes—supposedly impregnable—that are being used to encrypt German communications. Fifty years ago, even to tell such a story would have been a treasonable act; the existence of Bletchley, where Turing worked, remained a state secret. Now the tale is told as a thriller, with all scientific complexity stripped away and months of patient toil pared down to a single eureka moment in a pub. We even get a spy on the premises, for good measure. Morten Tyldum's film, scripted by Graham Moore, chops back and forth between Turing's school days, his code-breaking, and his arrest for homosexual activity after the war. "I think Alan Turing is hiding something," an inquiring policeman says, making perfectly sure that we can join the dots. The film is plain and stolid, not helped by murky, computer-generated images of planes and submarines, yet the central character continues to fascinate, and Cumberbatch is in his element. The supporting cast, which includes Charles Dance, Mark Strong, and Keira Knightley, has just the right pinch of wartime briskness.—*A.L.* (12/1/14) (In limited release.)

The Last Mistress

The director Catherine Breillat's period adaptation of an 1851 novel by Barbey d'Aureville delivers sex and pain with style and conviction that render her familiar themes new again. A young Parisian nobleman, Ryno de Marigny (Fu'ad Ait Aattou), is about to marry the virginal Hermengarde de Polastron (Roxane Mesquida) despite his notorious ten-year affair with a cigar-smoking Spanish spitfire, Vellini (Asia Argento), a drawing-room Carmen who pursues her prey ruthlessly. Argento lets loose earsplitting screams and throws her naked body around

OPENING COMET

Justin Long and Emmy Rossum star in this romantic comedy, about a six-year relationship that moves between Paris and New York. Directed by Sam Esmail. Opening Dec. 5. (In limited release.)

DYING OF THE LIGHT

A drama, directed by Paul Schrader, about a retired C.I.A. agent (Nicolas Cage) who pursues a terrorist. Opening Dec. 5. (In limited release.)

LIFE PARTNERS

A comic drama about a woman whose romantic relationship with a man threatens her bond with her best friend. Directed by Susanna Fogel; starring Leighton Meester, Gillian Jacobs, and Adam Brody. Opening Dec. 5. (In limited release.)

SHE'S BEAUTIFUL WHEN SHE'S ANGRY

Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening Dec. 5. (In limited release.)

A SPELL TO WARD OFF THE DARKNESS

In this drama, directed by Ben Rivers and Ben Russell, the musician Robert A. A. Lowe plays the leader of a commune on an Estonian island. Opening Dec. 5. (Film Society of Lincoln Center.)

WILD

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 5. (In limited release.)

ZERO MOTIVATION

A comedy about women soldiers on an Israeli military base, directed by Talya Lavie. Opening Dec. 3. (Film Forum.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

"Screenwriters and the Blacklist." Dec. 4 at 7: "He Ran All the Way" (1951, John Berry). • Dec. 4 and Dec. 8 at 9: "Cry, the Beloved Country" (1951, Zoltan Korda). • Dec. 5 at 7 and Dec. 9 at 9:15: "The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe" (1954, Luis Buñuel). • Dec. 6 at 4:30 and Dec. 8 at 7: "Intimate Stranger" (1956, Joseph Losey). • Dec. 6 at 9:15: "The Case Against Brooklyn" (1958,



MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of James Toback's "Fingers," from 1978, in our digital edition and online.

Paul Wendkos). • Dec. 7 at 4:30: "Terror in a Texas Town" (1958, Joseph H. Lewis). • Dec. 7 at 6:30: "Time Without Pity" (1957, Losey).

BAM CINÉMA TEK

"Overdue," screenings introduced by the critics Nick Pinkerton and Nic Rapold. Dec. 3 at 7: "Miami Blues" (1990, George Armitage). • Dec. 3 at 9:15: "Darker Than Amber" (1970, Robert Clouse). • "Sunshine Noir." Dec. 4 at 5:15 and 9:30: "Breathless" (1983, Jim McBride). • Dec. 4 at 7:30: "M." • Dec. 5 at 2 and 7: "Kiss Me Deadly" (1955, Robert Aldrich). • Dec. 6 at 5:30: "The Long Goodbye" (1973, Robert Altman). • Dec. 9 at 5 and 9:30: "Remember My Name." • Dec. 9 at 7:15: "The Nickel Ride" (1974, Robert Mulligan).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

"New Romanian Films." Dec. 4 at 7 and Dec. 5 at 4: "The Japanese Dog" (2013, Tudor Cristian Jurgiu). • Dec. 5 at 8:30: "Quod Erat Demonstrandum" (2013, Andrei Gruzniczki). • Dec. 6 at 5:15 and Dec. 7 at 5:30: "Roxanne" (2013, Valentin Hotea). • Dec. 7 at 3:30: "The Second Game."

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

In revival. Dec. 9 at 4 and 7:30: "The Last Mistress."

IFC CENTER

"Celluloid Dreams." Dec. 4 at 7: "Fanny and Alexander" (1982, Ingmar Bergman), introduced by the playwright Annie Baker.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"Acteurism: Joan Bennett." Dec. 3-5 at 1:30: "Wild Girl." • The films of Robert Altman. Dec. 3 at 7 and Dec. 7 at 1:30: "The Delinquents" (1957). • Dec. 4 at 7:30: "Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean" (1982). • Dec. 5 at 8 and Dec. 8 at 4:30: "The James Dean Story" (1957). • Dec. 6 at 2:30: "Corn's-A-Poppin'" (1956, Robert Woodburn). • Dec. 6 at 5: "The Player" (1992). • Dec. 6 at 8 and Dec. 9 at 4: "Countdown" (1968). • Dec. 7 at 7: "That Cold Day in the Park" (1969). • Dec. 8 at 8: "M*A*S*H" (1970). • Dec. 9 at 7: "Brewster McCLOUD" (1970).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

"See It Big! Animation." Dec. 7 at 1: "My Neighbor Totoro" (1988, Hayao Miyazaki).



THE FRONT ROW

Richard Brody discusses the films of Joseph Losey.

with a seemingly casual audacity, but she does the most substantive work more quietly, by way of smoldering stares and chilling whispers of mad intent. Breillat gives the entire cast of characters delicately declamatory manners that fit the refined depravity of their milieu, and she frames them in subtly sculptural images to match. From a knife blade to a broken glass, from a bullet to a gynecological ordeal, bloodshed saturates the taut dramatic fabric and suggests the destructive power of an obsession that owes little to pleasure. With Michael Lonsdale and Yolande Moreau, as a chorus of elders who get caught up in the tumult. Released in 2007. In French.—R.B. (French Institute Alliance Française; Dec. 9.)

M

The police investigation at the heart of Joseph Losey's 1951 remake of Fritz Lang's 1931 German classic, about the hunt for a serial child-killer, reflects the McCarthyite inquisitions that Losey was enduring at the time (and which led to his blacklisting and exile). Sticking closely to the plot of the original, Losey turns the story into pungent Americana through his attention to alluringly grubby Los Angeles locations. Ernest Laszlo's cinematography renders the mottled sidewalks and grim façades eloquent; urgent tracking and crane shots convey the paranoid pairing of menace and surveillance. David Wayne brings a hectic pathos to the role of the psychopath at war with his urges, and such iconic character actors as Howard Da Silva, Raymond Burr, Luther Adler, Norman Lloyd, Jim Backus, and Glenn Anders lend streetwise flair to the officers of the law and the underworld posse competing to catch the killer. The Brechtian irony of criminals delivering punishment is a Berlin import, the Freudian psychology is an American touch, and the corrosive view of the government is the kind that could—and did—get a filmmaker in trouble. Co-written by Waldo Salt (who was also blacklisted).—R.B. (BAM Cinématek; Dec. 4.)

Remember My Name

The writer and director Alan Rudolph's modernist refraction of classic melodrama, from 1978—about a woman who, after her release from prison, finds and stalks her ex-husband—suggests a quiet revolution in storytelling. Geraldine Chaplin, bladelike yet awkward, plays Emily, who shambles into a downbeat Los Angeles apartment, ingratiates herself with the landlord (Moses Gunn), finds a job at a store run by a benevolent geek (Jeff Goldblum), clashes with a co-worker (Alfre Woodard), and wreaks havoc on a construction worker (Anthony Perkins) and his new wife (Berry Berenson). Rudolph builds scenes from pent-up feelings and searing memories, endowing his actors with

a rich range of idiosyncratic actions and inflections and filming them in languid pan shots. Chaplin's performance is a tour de force of frustrated tenderness and impulsive violence; even just driving around, she seems ready yet unable to explode with a volcanic force, and Rudolph captures both her derangement and her vulnerability in jolting yet simple angles. Aided by songs performed by the octogenarian blueswoman Alberta Hunter, the filmmaker extracts new cinematic forms from venerable passions.—R.B. (BAM Cinématek; Dec. 9.)

Rosewater

In the best part of Jon Stewart's first film as a director, a real-life journalist, Maziar Bahari (Gael García Bernal), thrown into an Iranian prison in 2009 during a national election, is relentlessly tormented by a secret-police agent (Kim Bodnia), who wants Bahari to "confess" to being a Western spy (the Iranians have chosen to misunderstand a joking interview that Bahari gave with Jason Jones, from "The Daily Show"). As Bahari sits in a chair, a black blindfold covering his eyes, his interrogator lingers over his neck as if about to plant a kiss or take a bite. Stewart puts the two of them in a very tight frame, Bodnia smiling happily like a pleased headwaiter and Bernal sweating and trembling. The peculiar communion of torturer and victim has never been dramatized with such creepy immediacy. The rest of the movie, with its scrappy crowd scenes and overly explicit dialogue, lacks ease and mystery—what might be called authority. What comes through strongly, however, is the satirist's belief that a government without humor is capable of the greatest tyrannies. Based on actual events and on Bahari's book, "Then They Came for Me." Filmed in Amman, Jordan.—D.D. (11/24/14) (In limited release.)

The Second Game

The Romanian director Corneliu Porumboiu brings history close to home in this ingenious conceptual documentary. The film's images are a grainy video rebroadcast of a 1988 soccer game in Bucharest between two teams affiliated, respectively, with the Army and the secret police—a game for which Porumboiu's father, Adrian, was the referee. In lieu of the broadcast's original live sports commentary, Porumboiu fills the soundtrack with his own real-time discussion with his father, who, at the time of the match, was receiving death threats. Their talks reveal the former referee's insights into the political conflicts hidden behind the on-field struggle, his psychological probe of the players' personalities, and his own state of mind and plan of action while he deployed his power in the interest of a well-ordered microcosm. The resulting clash of sound and image gives the game the amplitude and the depth of a fictional work, and

offers allegorical implications for a society that was on the verge of drastic change.—R.B. (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Dec. 7.)

She's Beautiful When She's Angry

This stirring and informative documentary about the rise of the women's movement in the United States, between 1966 and 1971, is an enticing blend of historical clips (most too brief) and interviews with many of the movement's leaders. There's a warm, wise, passionate glow to this look at what the director, Mary Dore, depicts as a great political success story. Dore traces the movement to "The Feminine Mystique," by Betty Friedan, and to the civil-rights movement, with tributaries from the antiwar movement and New Left student activism. The movie is well organized thematically, with an emphasis on vast changes brought about by small groups of women. (The Jane collective, in Chicago, which provided abortion when it was illegal, is an exemplary portrait in courage.) Dore depicts the divergence between the practical and the radical, suggesting that the movement's excesses cost it some degree of influence. The updating of the story is sketchy; some dramatizations, though short, are distracting, but the overall impression, of a time of constant meetings and conversations that gave voice to stifled frustrations and united untapped energies, remains visionary and heroic.—R.B. (In limited release.)

Wild Girl

This turbulent and tangled Western, from 1932, directed by Raoul Walsh, depicts a rustic post-Civil War outpost in California in all its sordid, violent, and romantic energy. Salomy Jane (Joan Bennett), a barefoot backwoods maiden, innocently arouses the lust of the neighboring town's local grandee (Morgan Wallace), whose predatory past catches up with him in the person of a Virginia stranger (Charles Farrell), a Confederate veteran who comes to town to avenge his sister. Meanwhile, Salomy is being courted by a pair of rivals—a smooth-talking saloon gambler (Ralph Bellamy) and a crude rancher (Irving Pichel)—and protected by Yuba Bill (Eugene Pallette), the jolly and fast-witted coachman. But the deck is shuffled anew when she and the newcomer cross paths. Walsh's richly textured populist panorama, with its long-simmering feuds, casual gunplay, and corrupt local politics, along with the shoddy justice of vigilante mobs, blends the comic hyperbole of long-ago tall tales, the sentimental power of domesticity, and the tense spectacle of life and death in the daily balance. With Minna Gombell, as a sharp-tongued madam; Sarah Padden, as a layabout's long-suffering wife; and Louise Beavers, as Mammy Lou, who doesn't live separately but isn't treated equally.—R.B. (MOMA; Dec. 3-5.)



DANCE

Andrea Kleine

It's been ten years since Kleine last performed onstage. That absence is one of the subjects of "Screening Room, or the Return of Andrea Kleine," a performance that builds off a reenactment of an awful 1977 talk-show interview with Yvonne Rainer, a dancer who famously disappeared into the world of film. Kleine plays Rainer and the Hungarian lion-tamer character of Rainer's abstrusely wordy film "Kristina Talking Pictures," as well as herself, diverting the historical material into a story of her own ambivalence about performing. (The Chocolate Factory, 5-49 49th Ave., Long Island City. 866-811-4111. Dec. 3-6.)

Jessica Lang Dance / "The Wanderer"

The contemporary ballet choreographer Jessica Lang takes on one of Schubert's most moving song cycles, "Die Schöne Müllerin." The twenty songs, set to lyric poems by the German Romantic Wilhelm Müller, recount the story of a young man who falls in love with a miller's daughter, is spurned, and descends into despair and madness. In Lang's staging, the baritone Steven LaBrie sings while a cast of nine dancers create the world evoked in Müller's verses. White strings manipulated by the dancers become a semi-abstract landscape; the streetwear-inspired costumes are spare. It's an ambitious project. (BAM Fishman Space, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 3-6.)

Neil Greenberg

Greenberg's mode of reconstructing and rearranging videotaped improvisations is apparent in the eclectic look of his dances, now composed like ballet, now eccentric or awkward. This approach is also a way of thwarting interpretation, an aim furthered in his new piece "This." A cast of quietly compelling dancers, including Molly Lieber, Mina Nishimura, and Omagbitse Omagbemi, should make the movement meaningful regardless of the material's opacity. (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Dec. 3-6.)

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre

Apart from the obligatory "Revelations" and a few Ailey-Ellington programs, the repertory for the troupe's annual month at City Center has been thoroughly revamped during Robert Battle's three years as artistic director. The works he has commissioned and imported still display the superhuman abilities of the Ailey dancers, but they are more up to date and less ethnically specific. This week, the company débuts its take on "Uprising," a modern tribal ruckus by the Israeli-born Hofesh Shechter, and on Christopher Wheeldon's intimate and exposing piece "After the Rain Pas de Deux." (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 3-9. Through Jan. 4.)

"The Yorkville Nutcracker"

This home-town production, now almost two decades old, was created by the well-loved local teacher and choreographer Francis Patrelle. Much of the cast is made up of surprisingly polished students from ballet schools all over town. Little Mary, the heroine, is the daughter of Mayor Strong; among the guests at their Christmas party at Gracie Mansion is Teddy Roosevelt. There is no live music, alas, but the production does offer two impressive guests in the

roles of Sugarplum and her Cavalier: Abi Stafford and Adrian Danchig-Waring, both of New York City Ballet. (Kaye Playhouse, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-722-4448. Dec. 4-7.)

New York City Ballet / "The Nutcracker"

It's that time again when mice dance, snowflakes whirl, and a little girl defeats the forces of darkness with the toss of a slipper. You can't go wrong with George Balanchine's "Nutcracker," immensely popular since its creation, in 1954. It's not too long—about two hours—and offers a nice balance of pure dance, impeccable storytelling, and simple, satisfying stage magic. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Dec. 4-7 and Dec. 9. Through Jan. 3.)

RadioBallet / "The Nature of Love"


The young Hungarian performance artists Bea Egyed and Milán Újvári present a highly physical, sometimes combative duet that explores the dynamics of love. The two prod and push, dress and undress, and provoke anger and tenderness in each other, all to the music of Marilyn Manson, Bushman's Revenge, and the White Stripes. The duo appears as part of the series "Tánc/Dance," co-presented by the Hungarian Cultural Center. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Dec. 5-6.)

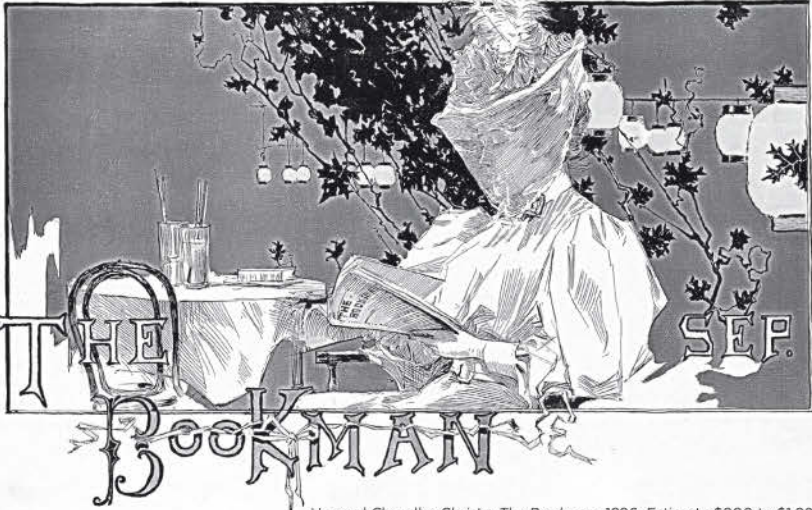
"Hip-Hop Nutcracker"

In recent years, the choreographer Jennifer Weber has made hip-hop dances set to Stravinsky and Vivaldi, with some fresh results. Now she tries Tchaikovsky, played by the Sonos Chamber Orchestra and remixed by DJ Boo. The traditional "Nutcracker" story has been moved to the present, on New Year's Eve in Washington Heights. The cast of twelve features the vibrant and nimble Virgil Gadsen, recently on Broadway in "After Midnight." Kurtis Blow, the pioneer m.c., raps the introduction. (New Jersey Performing Arts Center, 1 Center St., Newark. 800-745-3000. Dec. 5-6. United Palace, 4140 Broadway, at 175th St. 866-811-4111. Dec. 7.)

"Peter and the Wolf"

This charming, child-friendly entertainment by Prokofiev, created, in 1936, for the Moscow Children's Theatre, tells of the adventures of a young boy. Isaac Mizrahi is the avuncular narrator and the brain behind this pleasingly homespun staging, which moves the action to New York's Central Park. The characters' musical motifs have been developed by the young choreographer John Heginbotham into witty little dance numbers. The thirty-minute piece will be played live by the Ensemble Signal. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3575. Dec. 6-7. Through Dec. 14.)





Howard Chandler Christy, *The Bookman*, 1896. Estimate \$800 to \$1,200.

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At Miller Theatre, the Either/Or ensemble, conducted by Richard Carrick, offers an all-Makan concert.

DEAD CALM

The eerie stillness of Keeril Makan's music.

IN “**RESONANCE ALLOY**,” which the Either/Or ensemble presented at Miller Theatre in 2011, the composer Keeril Makan pulled off a small miracle: a half-hour-long piece for solo percussion that completely commands your attention. Its severely restricted collection of unpitched timbres (the player strikes a gong and three cymbals in an incessant stream of rhythm) has its antecedents in compositions by James Tenney and Alvin Lucier, but the work's brave exploration of expressive territory makes it memorable. It's lulling, thrilling, and, at times, downright eerie.

Raised in New Jersey by parents of Indian-South African and Russian Jewish heritage, Makan was immersed from an early age in a broad array of musical cultures—rock, blues, Western and Indian classical traditions—that give color and edge to his musical ideas. Many young composers spin the repetitious patterns of American minimalism as mere backdrop. Makan, however, brings the spirit of his diverse musical inheritance into the still center of his compositions, building structures with deep patience and infinite calm.

Now Either/Or, conducted by Richard Carrick, is back at Miller to offer an all-Makan concert in the venue's “Composer Portraits” series (Dec. 5). Makan, who teaches at M.I.T., may be surrounded by high technology, but his music reveals an abiding affection for acoustic instruments. In addition to a world premiere (“If We Knew the Sky”), the program offers the New York premiere of “Letting Time Circle Through Us” (2013). This searching, fifty-minute sextet is a potent collision of opposites: the fixed pitches of piano and mallet percussion dialogue with the primitive tonal ambiguity of a cimbalom and a guitar, while the incipient lyricism of the violin and cello, yearning to take the music elsewhere, is stubbornly held back by the force of minimalist flow. “I hope the emotional narratives of my music will resonate with the audience,” Makan has said. “In this resonance, I think the barriers that separate us are lowered, and our suffering is lessened.”

—Russell Platt



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OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Getting back into the groove at the Met, James Levine has been revisiting many of his specialties—Mozart, the Second Viennese School, and now Wagner, with a welcome return of the Otto Schenk production of “**Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg**,” a weighty and extraordinarily demanding work that, under his baton, can seem to possess the freshness of springtime. James Morris, another Wagnerian with a long and distinguished record at the house, returns to the role of Hans Sachs, leading a cast that also features Annette Dasch, Karen Cargill, Paul Appleby, Johan Botha, and Hans-Peter König. (In the first of two performances, on Dec. 9 the eminent German baritone Michael Voelle takes over for Morris.) (Dec. 6 and Dec. 9 at 6.) • **Also playing:** With its stuccoed walls, pretty orange grove, and smartly executed bits of stage business, Bartlett Sher's durable staging of Rossini's “**Il Barbiere di Siviglia**” has enhanced brilliant performances and buttressed lackluster ones. The current revival features fine singing from Isabel Leonard (a beautiful, coquettish Rosina), Lawrence Brownlee (a Count Almaviva with bravura to spare), Christopher Maltman (a virile Figaro), and Maurizio Muraro (whose Bartolo is refreshingly less buffoonish than usual); Michele Mariotti conducts. (Dec. 3 at 7:30 and Dec. 6 at noon. These are the final performances.) • Richard Eyre's new staging of “**Le Nozze di Figaro**” would seem to be the kind of production—accessible and entertaining, but smart and cunning, too—that Peter Gelb has been praying for these past eight years. James Levine led a delightful opening run, and now he cedes the podium to Edo de Waart, who conducts a cast that includes Erwin Schrott and Danielle de Niese, in the roles of Figaro and Susanna; Mariusz Kwiecien and Rachel Willis-Sørensen, as the Count and Countess; and Serena Melfi, as Cherubino. (Dec. 4 and Dec. 8 at 7:30.) • The latest revival of “**La Bohème**” features the singers Sonya Yoncheva (an impressive débutante) and Ramón Vargas, as Mimì and Rodolfo, and Susanna Phillips and David Bizic, taking the roles of Musetta and Marcello; Riccardo Frizza. (Dec. 5 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

“The Classical Style”

Charles Rosen's brilliant book has illuminated the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven since its publication, in 1971. Now it is the subject of a witty little opera (“of Sorts”) by the composer Steven Stucky and the librettist Jeremy Denk (also known for his piano playing), which imagines Rosen in conversation with the three crestfallen subjects of his study; there's also a love triangle between the personified Tonic, Dominant, and Subdominant scale degrees. A hit at the Ojai Festival last summer, it comes to Zankel Hall accompanied by the Knights chamber orchestra, conducted by Robert Spano; the evening begins with a solo performance by Denk. (212-247-7800. Dec. 4 at 7:30.)

Gotham Chamber Opera: "Puss in Boots"

Gotham, in collaboration with Tectonic Theatre Project, is reviving its acclaimed production of the Spanish master Xavier Montsalvatge's opera "El Gato con Botas" (a fanciful treatment of the old European tale) with the participation of two admired figures: the director Moisés Kaufman and the choreographer Seán Curran. Neal Goren and Geoff MacDonald share conducting duties in the course of the run, which takes place at El Teatro at El Museo del Barrio, in Harlem. (Fifth Ave. at 104th St. gothamchamberopera.org. Performed in Spanish, with supertitles, on Dec. 6 and Dec. 9 at 7 and in English on Dec. 7 at 2. Through Dec. 14.)

Teatro Regio Torino: "Guglielmo Tell"

"Guillaume Tell" ("William Tell," an adaptation of Schiller's drama based on the Swiss legend), Rossini's final work for the stage, is one of the first great examples of nineteenth-century *grand opéra* in its heroic theme, massed forces, and serious tone (not to mention its sweeping overture). Not seen at the Met since 1931, it will be given a concert performance (in Italian) by the orchestra and chorus of this Turin company, which in recent years has been brought to an exceptional level by the dynamic conductor Gianandrea Noseda. Luca Salsi takes the title role, leading a large cast that includes John Osborn as Arnoldo and Angela Meade as Matilde. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 7 at 2.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

"Dohnányi / Dvořák: A Philharmonic Festival"

The Jaap van Zweden residency at the New York Philharmonic closes; the Christoph von Dohnányi fortnight begins. This august maestro's focus is on Dvořák, a composer whose music he interprets with a probing, Germanic temperament. Alisa Weilerstein, a vibrant soloist, is the guest for the first week's program: two mighty works, the Cello Concerto and the Seventh Symphony. (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 4 and Dec. 9 at 7:30, Dec. 5 at 2, and Dec. 6 at 8. For tickets and a full schedule of events, see nyphil.org.)

Philadelphia Orchestra

Yannick Nézet-Séguin's next Carnegie Hall engagement with his luminous ensemble reverses the trajectory of the usual concert format: we get the majestic weight of Brahms's arch-Romantic Symphony No. 3 in F Major before intermission, followed by Haydn's crisply classical Cello Concerto in C Major (with Jean-Guihen Queyras) and the gloriously decadent froth of Strauss's Suite from the opera "Der Rosenkavalier." (212-247-7800. Dec. 5 at 8.)

Orpheus Chamber Orchestra

Jennifer Koh, one of America's most intrepid standout violinists, enjoys a close collegial relationship with the up-and-coming British-born composer Anna Clyne. "Rest Your Hands," a concerto arrangement of a Bach-inspired chamber work, has its world-première in a program with the conductorless chamber orchestra that also includes Grieg's sweetly diverting "Holberg Suite" and Mozart's Symphony No. 34 in C Major. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 6 at 7.)

Juilliard415: "La Resurrezione"

William Christie, the director of Les Arts Florissants and, of late, the éminence grise of Juilliard's ambitious period-performance department, conducts Handel's Italian oratorio from 1708 in a concert featuring singers from the school's Marcus Institute for Vocal Arts, at Alice Tully Hall. (212-721-6500. Dec. 8 at 8.)

RECITALS

Itzhak Perlman

Not since 2007 has the king of American violinists offered a recital program in New York. This week, however, in anticipation of his seventieth birthday, he returns to Avery Fisher Hall with his longtime accompanist, Rohan De Silva; the program features works by Vivaldi and Schumann, along with sonatas by Beethoven (No. 7 in C Minor) and Ravel, and selections to be announced from the stage. (212-721-6500. Dec. 3 at 7:30.)

Juilliard Songfest: "Songs of Charles Baudelaire"

Dozens of distinctive musicians have been drawn to the French Symbolist poet's exotic swirl of words. Juilliard's Brian Zeger curates this concert, accompanying fine student singers in songs by such composers as Duparc ("L'Invitation au Voyage"), Debussy, Chausson, Fauré, Hindemith, and Daron Hagen. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Dec. 4 at 8.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: "The Four Seasons"

The Society begins its "Baroque Collection" holiday concerts with this tribute to Vivaldi's beloved suite of violin concertos, the grand finale of a program that will also include sonatas and concertos by Albinoni, Geminiani, and Telemann; the violinists include the estimable Ani Kavafian and Arnaud Sussmann. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 5 at 7:30 and Dec. 7 at 5.)

Philip Glass: "The Études"

BAM celebrates the work of one of its iconic composers in a program of some of his most intimate music: his Études for piano, composed during a

twenty-year period. Glass himself will participate, joining a crew of devoted friends and associates that includes Jenny Lin, Bruce Levinston, and Maki Namekawa, as well as the composers Tania León, Timo Andres, and Nico Muhly. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. Dec. 5-6 at 7:30.)

Roulette: JACK Quartet and Annie Gosfield

"Signal Jamming and Random Interference" is the title of Gosfield's latest work, part of her long series of pieces that imaginatively make use of found sounds: in this case, fragments of jammed radio signals used to confound the enemy in the Second World War. Gosfield will electronically manipulate those ghostly voices, in league with the deft fingers of the fantastic young new-music string quartet. (509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. roulette.org. Dec. 7 at 8.)

"tears become . . . streams become . . ."

Hélène Grimaud, a poetic interpreter of the piano repertoire for two decades, engages in her grandest project to date, a nearly two-week collaboration with the Turner Prize-winning artist Douglas Gordon. Grimaud will perform an evening concert of water-themed works by such composers as Berio, Liszt, Debussy, and Ravel, in the enormous Wade Thompson Drill Hall; during the daytime, visitors can experience Gordon's meditative aquatic environment, which will fill the entirety of the space. (Park Ave. at 66th St. armoryonpark.org. Dec. 9 at 7. Through Dec. 21.)

Daniil Trifonov

The fabulous young Russian pianist takes the stage at Carnegie Hall to present a typically daunting program: music by Bach, Beethoven (the valedictory Sonata in C Minor, Op. 111), and Liszt (the "Transcendental Études"). (212-247-7800. Dec. 9 at 8.)

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NIGHT LIFE



Ira Kaplan, Georgia Hubley, and James McNew are reissuing their 1993 album, "Painful," this month.

HOBOKEN HEROES

A thirtieth birthday for Yo La Tengo, at Town Hall.

YO LA TENGO HAS BEEN around for thirty stubborn years, and, in honor of being a band for so long, the trio is playing a handful of shows, including two in New York. The obvious antecedent of the group, founded in Hoboken, is the Velvet Underground. (Its members—Ira Kaplan, Georgia Hubley, and James McNew—even played the Underground in the 1996 film "I Shot Andy Warhol.") Yo La Tengo is specifically rooted in the Velvet Underground's third, eponymous album, in which the delicate and the noisy collapse into each other, and even violent feedback feels soft. Dozens of bands have sprung from this source, including My Bloody Valentine and the Feelies, but Yo La Tengo has never been big on the obscure or the hip side of the Velvets; it votes, repeatedly, for beauty.

This month the band is also reissuing "Painful," its marvellous 1993 album. For Kaplan, this record is the point at which the group really began. "Anyone who ever said they liked our older records more than 'Painful,' I just told them they're wrong," he said. "Painful" hums and rises and burns, but it does little rocking—the band's never been very interested in that. Kaplan's singing is implacable and calm, and the songs rely on the purity of clear melodic lines, even when they are filtered by distortion. Yo La Tengo has an approachable quality. Each year, the band plays a Hanukkah show at Maxwell's, the Hoboken rock club that was sold in January; there's none of the haughtiness that surrounds so many of the Underground's descendants. Kaplan, Hubley, and McNew apply themselves to one of the most common templates in indie rock and consistently get it right: melodies you can remember easily and eruptions of noise that you can't be sure even happened, with sharp and unadorned language. They're the cool kids who refuse to act cooler than you, and they will play Town Hall on Dec. 3 and 4.

—Sasha Frere-Jones

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Brooklyn Rock Lottery

It's a risky but common practice for a new band to book its first show before the songs are fleshed out. This annual event ups the ante by organizing handpicked local musicians into pickup bands that write short sets with only twelve hours to prepare (and a one-cover-song limit). This year's event features a cadre of talent, including players from Parquet Courts, Sebadoh, Au Revoir Simone, and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. All proceeds go to Harmony Program, a nonprofit devoted to supporting after-school music education in low-income communities. (Baby's All Right, 146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800. Dec. 6.)

Daptone Super Soul Revue

Here's a match made in soul-music heaven. The Apollo Theatre, which hosted revues of artists from Stax and Motown Records and provided the stage—and the vibe—for James Brown's "Live at the Apollo," will present three nights of talent from Daptone Records, out of Brooklyn, today's undisputed leader in high-quality, low-down, genuine old-school sounds. Headlining each night will be the indestructible **Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings**, supported by the Brown disciple **Charles Bradley** and a wealth of talent from the label, including **Antibalas**, the **Budos Band**, the **Menahan Street Band**, **Naomi Shelton and the Gospel Queens**, and the **Sugarman Three**. Hosted by the Dap-King guitarist **Binky Griptite**, these performances will be recorded for a live album. (253 W. 125th St. 800-745-3000. Dec. 4-6.)

Flatbush Zombies and the Underachievers

The Flatbush Zombies, a charismatic hip-hop trio hailing from their namesake part of Brooklyn, and the Underachievers, friends from around the way, have teamed up for a tour. They released a joint EP this October, called "Clockwork Indigo," which is typical of their work, with carefully crafted and shrewdly delivered lyrics, intricate production, and plenty of verbal imagery to take in. (Best Buy Theatre, Broadway at 44th St. 800-745-3000. Dec. 5.)

John Lennon Tribute

Any contemporary Lennon tribute concert is a complicated thing, tying together strands of nostalgia, charity, and creative achievement. The thirty-fourth annual installation of this event includes a number of stars whose heydays were in the seventies and eighties but who have continued, for the most part, to produce interesting work: **Debbie Harry**, **Kate Pierson**, **David Johansen**,

and **Marshall Crenshaw**. **Ben E. King**, who sang the original version of "Stand by Me," which Lennon covered and which was his last hit while he was still alive, will also be on hand. The rock-and-roll photographer **Bob Gruen**, who took many of the iconic pictures of Lennon, will be honored. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. lennontribute.org. Dec. 5.)

Lucius

After opening for Jack White in the U.K., this Brooklyn-based act resumes its headliner status with a run of a shows in the Northeast. The group turned heads with its self-titled EP, in 2012, then blew critics away with its debut album, "Wildewoman," full of upbeat country-inflected synth pop that takes cues from both sixties girl groups and modern indie rock. The quintet features two lead female vocalists, Jess Wolfe and Holly Laessig, who typically dress alike, in natty mod outfits. The pair delivers seemingly impossible harmonies with flawless grace and brings delicate beauty to even the most bombastic moments. (Terminal 5, 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Dec. 6.)

The 1975

The members of this Manchester-based act started playing music together in high school, with a focus on pop punk, before rebooting as a rock band. Starting in 2012, they released a string of EPs, whetting appetites for a full-length release, which came the

following year. Profoundly influenced by John Hughes flicks, the outfit's self-titled debut album traffics in heavy synths, anguished vocals, and flashes of funk that may make you wonder why the quartet isn't called *The 1985*, though that would be less romantic — "The 1975" was inspired by a date that the lead vocalist and guitarist Matt Healy found scrawled in a book of Beat poetry. (Terminal 5, 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Dec. 4-5.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Azar Lawrence

On December 9, 1964, John Coltrane stepped into Rudy Van Gelder's studio, in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, with his classic quartet (the bassist Jimmy Garrison, the drummer Elvin Jones, and the pianist McCoy Tyner) and recorded, in a single session, "A Love Supreme," one of the most acclaimed and best-selling jazz albums of all time. Lawrence, a stirring, Coltrane-obsessed saxophonist of unrelenting fervor, as well as a onetime Tyner associate, celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the album at the Jazz Standard. He's there with his quartet, featuring the pianist **Benito Gonzalez**, the drummer **Billy Hart**, and the bassist **Reggie Workman**, who played with Coltrane in 1961. (116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Dec. 9-10.)

Christian McBride

The ne plus ultra of mainstream bassists takes over the Village Vanguard

for a two-week run, fronting a pair of stylish ensembles. Leading off, Dec. 2-7, he's there with his Inside Straight band, which is stocked with such bop-inclined partners as the saxophonist **Steve Wilson**, the pianist **Peter Martin**, and the vibraphonist **Warren Wolf**. A lean and wiry trio, with the pianist **Christian Sands**, follows, Dec. 9-14. (178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037.)

Pat Metheny

The venerable guitarist's Unity Group meshes his undulating lines with those of the quicksilver saxophonist **Chris Potter** and the sharply etched rhythms of the bassist **Ben Williams** and the drummer **Antonio Sanchez**, achieving the sonic grandeur that is Metheny's stock-in-trade. For the band's most recent album, "Kin (←→)," a new member came aboard, **Giulio Carmassi**, a multi-instrumentalist and vocalist whose contributions add still more layers of textural color. (Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Dec. 2-7.)

Melissa Stylianou

A crafty stylist like Stylianou knows that a subtle voice, skillfully employed, can be an effective tool for maximum expression. Her subtle charms are in abundance on her latest album, "No Regrets," which features the pianist **Bruce Barth**. He's with her at the Jazz Standard on Dec. 2, along with the saxophonist **Billy Drewes**, the bassist **Linda Oh**, and the drummer **Matt**

Wilson, to celebrate its release. (116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232.)

Henry Threadgill

As demonstrated by the recent celebratory concerts at Harlem Stage, organized by the pianist Jason Moran, young players are still being drawn to the inclusive music of Henry Threadgill, an omnivorous artistic powerhouse who turned seventy this year. At Roulette, he premieres four new pieces in two nights, featuring soloists from his unconventional Zooid ensemble: the acoustic guitarist **Liberty Ellman**, the drummer **Elliot Humberto Kavee**, the cellist **Christopher Hoffman**, and the tuba and trombone player **Jose Davila**. (509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. 917-267-0363. Dec. 4-5.)

Steve Tyrell

Tyrell came to performing late in a professional life that found him playing significant behind-the-scenes roles in the music business, and he's an affable, gruff-voiced singer who can make you believe he's always been out front, so great is his delight at finding himself onstage. Celebrating the tenth anniversary of his holiday run at the Café Carlyle, Tyrell debuts a new show, which features songs by Burt Bacharach, Carole King, and other icons of twentieth-century pop music, as found on his eleventh studio album, "That Lovin' Feelin'." (Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. 212-744-1600. Through Dec. 31.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

Puppets & Poets

The Bushwick Starr, a small venue that's easy to miss, has an underground, obscure feel that is often reflected in its shows. For the fourth year in a row, the space hosts the nonprofit, volunteer-operated artist collective Alphabet Arts, whose program mixes poetry with puppetry. Among the acts is an Emily Dickinson poem interpreted as "a Parisian-style puppet circus" and a feminist-inspired performance that uses live plants as puppets. The evenings include a cabaret show intended for mature audiences; the weekend matinees are free and appropriate for all ages. (207 Starr St., Brooklyn. thebushwickstarr.org. Dec. 4-7.)

Brooklyn Holiday Book Fair

This annual gathering at the Old Stone House, in Park Slope, hosts independent Brooklyn bookstores and vendors showcasing rare, vintage, and out-of-print books. The event features literary gems available from Honey & Wax Booksellers, Brooklyn Books,

Enchanted Books, Faenwyl Bindery, P.S. Bookshop, Freebird Books, Open Air Modern, Singularity & Co., Terrace Books, and the booksellers Joe Maynard and Tom Davidson. The artist and *New Yorker* contributor Maira Kalman will also be on hand to sign her new book, "My Favorite Things." (Washington Park, 3rd St. at Fifth Ave., Brooklyn. theoldstonehouse.org. Dec. 6, from 11 to 5.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Just as his fellow Nobel laureate Francis Crick did before him, James D. Watson, the co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, is selling off his 1962 Nobel medal to the highest bidder at **Christie's** (Dec. 4). Watson, now eighty-six, is a chancellor emeritus at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. (His intentions are philanthropic.) If you arrive early for the sale of books and manuscripts in the morning, you can scoop up a first edition of Darwin's "On the Origin of Species." (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at

49th St. 212-636-2000.) • Among the treasures in **Sotheby's** sale of Judaica on Dec. 4 is a prayer book written out in the elegant, clear hand of the eighteenth-century Austrian scribe Aryeh Judah Leib Sofer ben Elhanan Katz. The tome is filled with colored-ink drawings, floral decorations, and illuminations. This sale is followed later in the day by a selection of Israeli art, including abstract canvases by Mordecai Ardon and Chagall-like compositions by Reuven Rubin. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

READINGS AND TALKS

National Arts Club

The *New Yorker* cartoonist Roz Chast discusses her book "Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?," a National Book Award nominee, a first for a graphic memoir in the nonfiction category. (15 Gramercy Park S. 212-475-3424. Dec. 2 at 8.)

RISC Benefit and Silent Auction

The nonprofit organization Reporters Instructed in Saving Colleagues is auctioning forty-five photographs to support its training efforts. On the final night of bidding, the journalist Sebastian Junger and the photographer Susan Meiselas talk about the dangers of their work. (Aperture Gallery, 547 W. 27th St. risctraining.org. Dec. 3, from 6:30 to 9:30.)

"An Actors' Reading of Bertolt Brecht's 'Love Poems'"

Tony Kushner directs a program in honor of the publication of Brecht's "Love Poems," which were written between 1918 and 1955. (New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Bruno Walter Auditorium, 111 Amsterdam Ave., between 64th and 65th Sts. poetrysociety.org. Dec. 4 at 6.)



ART

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"Tullio Lombardo's 'Adam': A Masterpiece Restored." Through July 31.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms for Expanding Megacities." Through May 10.

MOMA PSI

"The Little Things Could Be Dearer." Through March 8.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

"Zero: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s-60s." Through Jan. 7.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

"Judith Scott: Bound and Unbound." Through March 29.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

"The Butterfly Conservatory." Through May 25.

BRONX MUSEUM

"Michael Joo: Suture." Through Jan. 4.

FRICK COLLECTION

"Masterpieces from the Scottish National Gallery." Through Feb. 1.

JEWISH MUSEUM

"Helena Rubinstein: Beauty Is Power." Through March 22.

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

"The Untamed Landscape: Théodore Rousseau and the Path to Barbizon." Through Jan. 18.

NEW MUSEUM

"Chris Ofili: Night and Day." Through Feb. 1.



GOINGS ON, ONLINE

The Metropolitan Museum presents its annual performance of David Lang's shattering "Little Match Girl Passion."

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum

"Madame Cézanne"

A trickier exhibition than it first appears, this apple-free show gazes, through the unlikely lens of biography, at a painter who distilled images into pure form. Twenty-four works, spanning two decades and arrayed here like sentries, portray Cézanne's mistress turned wife, Hortense, in radically flat compositions. Some are spare and impressionistic, such as an 1885 painting, on loan from the Musée d'Orsay, in which a boyish Hortense gazes forth with pursed lips. Others are boldly experimental, notably a bonkers 1887 portrait with clashing patterned fabrics—a striped sea-green dress, a red armchair, and olive wallpaper. Ever stern in the paintings, Hortense appears warmer in several preparatory sketches, suggesting that her husband had much grander goals for his art than physical verisimilitude or spiritual authenticity. What was she really like? What influence did she have on her husband's aesthetic development? These are valid and difficult questions, but if you seek the answers in the paintings you've missed the whole point of Cézanne, and of the formal revolution that he provoked—which Hortense may have inspired. Through March 15.

New-York Historical Society

"Annie Leibovitz: Pilgrimage"

The photographer, best known for her celebrity portraits, explores more personal territory in these photographs of the homes and belongings of the famous people who have influenced her, including Julia Margaret Cameron, Eleanor Roosevelt, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Pete Seeger. At once shrewd and charming, the images—Sigmund Freud's couch, Virginia Woolf's ink-stained writing desk, a television set shot with a bullet by Elvis Presley—let Leibovitz craft an extended self-portrait. She's also careful to include crowd-pleasing views of Niagara Falls, Gettysburg, Old Faithful, and, in tribute to Ansel Adams, Yosemite Valley. In her mix of the universal and the particular, Leibovitz comes across as a familiar American character: sensible, sensitive, and more reserved than revealing. Through Feb. 22.

Studio Museum in Harlem

"Speaking of People: *Ebony*, *Jet* and Contemporary Art"

In 1945, the Johnson Publishing Company saw a place in the market for an intelligent, modern magazine for African-Americans, and sixty years later *Ebony* is still going strong, though

its sister title, *Jet*, is now online-only. (The company's current C.E.O., Desirée Rogers—who is name-checked in a Theater Gates video here—previously served as White House social secretary but was fired for letting a Real Housewife crash a party.) This show reveals how the magazines offered new models of black representation, even as their positive portrayals of a disfavored minority opened the door to the consumerism that Ellen Gallagher critiques in her obliterating collages. Amid an all-star roster, which includes Lorna Simpson, Kerry James Marshall, and Glenn Ligon, the most stimulating inclusion is the Ghanaian artist Godfried Donkor. His imagined African editions of *Ebony* invest historical visions of black America with the vivacity of contemporary Lagos and Johannesburg. Through March 8.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Sunil Gupta

The Indian photographer lived in New York in the mid-nineteen-seventies, when he took the black-and-white photographs in his "Christopher Street" series, shown here for the first time. His subjects are other gay men cruising the busy Village artery, dressed in the style of the time: bomber jackets, tight jeans, plaid shirts, aviator shades. But the work owes its frisson to more than just fashion; even when no glances are exchanged, Gupta gives his images a subtle erotic charge and a genuine tenderness. Through Dec. 20. (Sepia Eye, 547 W. 27th St. 212-967-0738.)

Alex Ross

Animal, vegetable, or mineral? The answer's all three in the wildly imagined, if mannered, new paintings of this mid-career American artist. Ross combines portrait, still-life, and landscape, with a nod to the composite sleight of hand of Giuseppe Arcimboldo, not to mention Mr. Potato Head: mountains stick out their tongues, land masses morph into bullfrogs, and earlike blobs occupy eye sockets. Terrestrial greens and celestial blues dominate Ross's palette, punctuated by peaky yellows and raw-meat pinks and reds (somewhere, Chaim Soutine and Philip Guston are smiling). For all their painterly know-how, there's a refreshing idiosyncrasy to Ross's sci-fi grotesqueries, in which strangers and strange lands become one. Through Dec. 6. (Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190.)

Christopher Williams

Williams's intricate conceptual framework remains all but impenetrable to the casual viewer, but the photographer's signature pared-down installation style has become increasingly elegant and arresting in the course of his thirty-five-year career. Following his recent MOMA retrospective, it's clear that Williams sees each element in the gallery as part of his art work. There are no accidents here: walls that have been removed from or imported into

the space are just as meaningful, or just as pointless, as the eight photographs here. Those pictures (many with titles that are hundreds of words long) include handsome images of a rooster, a suitcase under an airplane seat, and the right headlights of several 1967 Citroëns. Make of it what you will. Through Dec. 20. (Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Josh Faught

The fibre works of this San Francisco-based artist—woven or crocheted, wall-mounted or hanging from wooden supports—delve into the archives of gay history, with results that are sweet and sour by turns. Men's first names (the artist's exes) are hand-dyed into the fabrics, which also incorporate spilled wine and coffee, political buttons, an ashtray from Palm Springs, and, in one case, forties-era personal ads for men who list their interests in "amateur theatricals" or "physical culture pictures." The artist's engagement with the vicissitudes of queer life, not to mention with the feminist tradition of textile arts, is rewarding. But, while the personal may be political, Faught's emphasis on his own romantic escapades undercuts his attempt at historical reclamation. Through Dec. 21. (Cooley, 107 Norfolk St. 212-680-0564.)

Matt Hoyt

Two dozen of the artist's careful sculptures, none larger than a few cubic inches, have a wordless appeal. Their forms recall rocks, petrified eggs, shards of bone, or maybe children's toys from some prehistoric civilization. (One could do without the painted panels they sit on: sea foam, slate gray, pale pink, all very *Martha Stewart Living*.) Though the works are exceedingly delicate, they aren't merely a showcase of Hoyt's technique. Quite the contrary, actually: they each have the inadvertency, and the beauty, of a perfect shell washed up on shore. Through Dec. 21. (Bureau, 178 Norfolk St. 212-227-2783.)

Kaari Upson

In claustrophobic, triangular galleries, the Los Angeles-based artist has installed fantastic soft sculptures whose enigmatic forms imply a domesticity gone to seed. Baggy, drooping urethane somethings, painted an iridescent purple, suggest deflated life rafts. A distorted cinder block rests in front of a door, and a coffin-black object is crumpled in a corner. You might think of Claes Oldenburg's floppy vinyl sculptures, but Upson's art is far less decipherable; it's as if the narrative force has been removed, along with the air supply. More than two hundred soot-covered cans of Pepsi, arrayed against the walls and stacked into a ladder, compound the dark mood. Through Dec. 14. (Ramiken Crucible, 389 Grand St. 917-434-4245.)



TABLES FOR TWO

TURNTABLE MAD FOR CHICKEN

314 Fifth Ave. (212-714-9700)

WE NEED TO TALK about chicken. Not the buttermilk-crusted crags and crevices of the South but the Korean variety: smooth, with a slight shimmer, resembling a lunar landscape, or at least what the moon looks like from Earth. Amid a crowded field in the shadow of the Empire State Building, there's a particularly fine rendition of Korean fried chicken at the lavishly named Turntable Retro Bar & Restaurant Mad for Chicken, part of a mini-chain that originated in Flushing. Like many of Koreatown's best establishments, it's on the second floor of a bleak office building. After eight, a d.j. in a glass booth makes his presence known, loudly, to all the restaurant's customers, many of whom have enthusiastically embraced the truth that fried chicken is a drunk food par excellence.

If that's the route you'd like to take, do not let the long list of signature Martinis distract you. One of them—the Earl Gray Twist—comes with a Mighty Leaf teabag awkwardly dangling off the side; another, the Blueberry Martini, lists sour mix as an ingredient. When the most drinkable of the cocktails is made with Cognac (Men in Cognac, which sounds like a misandrist's excellent revenge plot), it's an indicator that soju or beer is best. There are plenty of other things to avoid, too: undercooked kimchi pancakes, a “Mexican-style” appetizer of mozzarella-covered corn, tables of men with rolled-up shirtsleeves ordering shots and talking about a bungee-jumping video they posted on Facebook. And although the menu has all the Korean dishes Americans might expect, none are exceptional.

After everyone's poked their chopsticks around in a dish of reliably chewy rice cakes with bulgogi, the chicken is eaten swiftly and in silence—or as quietly as possible when it's oldies night and the d.j.'s got to the sotto-voce part of “Total Eclipse of the Heart.” There are many reasons why Korean fried chicken is such a superbly satisfying eating experience. Fingers aren't spoiled, because the sauce is lightly brushed on, and only after the chicken is cooked. The meat remains juicy, because the bird is cooked at a lower temperature than its American brethren. The chicken is dipped in a very finely ground flour, and, as a result, the shell is paper-thin, almost translucent; it is pierced, not shattered, on first bite. Because the skin and flesh are cooked evenly, the disconcerting layer of fat in between is exorcised. Although Turntable offers a soy-and-garlic sauce, the hot and spicy is the main event, with a slow and subtle burn. A plate of wings with a side of pickled daikon radish is the ideal mix of salty and sour, crunchy and chewy. Human tastebuds are powerless against such a deeply addictive sequence. All there is to do is add soju, and repeat.

—Amelia Lester

Open daily for lunch and dinner. Chicken plates \$9.95-\$22.95.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LAUREN LANCASTER



FOOD & DRINK


BAR TAB KILO BRAVO

180 N. 10th St., Brooklyn (347-987-4379)

“I will believe it a good comfortable road until I am compelled to believe differently,” Meriwether Lewis wrote as he and William Clark came upon the Rocky Mountains, in 1805. A similarly optimistic duo, having procured G-train reading material, struck out, two centuries later, for a new bar in Williamsburg. They found it most welcoming, with Giants tribesmen—“Manning” and “Cruz,” according to their battle garb—cheering beneath a mounted gilt bison head. In addition to common brews and wines, this bar tendered fifty cocktails, one for each state. Like Lewis and Clark, our travellers began near St. Louis, with the aim of drinking westward, along the explorers' trail. “Keep in mind that part of doing a road trip is that some states suck,” the barkeep cautioned. He deemed the Missouri Mule (bourbon, applejack, Cointreau, Campari) and Nebraska's Cornhusker (corn whiskey, vermouth) “a couple of doozies.” When asked for the President (South Dakota) and a spearminty, electric-blue Howlin' Wolf (North Dakota), the tapper winced, declaring, “I would've taken either of the first two over these.” Yet the duo staggered on, as the vicious Seahawk people routed the Giants. The next stop was to be Montana, with its Tornado—bourbon, gin, tequila—more deadly than a beaver bite, but our explorers toasted defeat with a Budweiser “pounder,” a homecoming to Missouri, of sorts.

—Emma Allen





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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT CRIMES AND COMMISSIONS

History may or may not repeat itself, but crisis-stricken politicians certainly do. Two weeks ago, Governor Jay Nixon, of Missouri, announced the swearing in of sixteen members of a commission to examine police procedures and community relations in Ferguson. The announcement was made in advance of the grand-jury decision in the death of Michael Brown, which resulted in renewed rioting in the city and demonstrations across the country. Nixon, whose handling of the situation had already been severely criticized, holds the distinction of creating a commission whose existence preceded the unrest that it will presumably be charged with addressing. This was a sign of either governmental prescience or resignation—or, possibly, both. A defining achievement of American bureaucracy is that even assaults on its authority wind up generating more bureaucracy.

In 1967, in the wake of riots that had scorched several American cities, Lyndon B. Johnson authorized the creation of the Kerner Commission, to examine the roots of the conflicts. The commission's report is best known for its conclusion that the United States was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal," but it also included a more granular examination of the issue. It stated:

Today, whites tend to exaggerate how well and quickly they escaped from poverty. The fact is that immigrants who came from rural backgrounds, as many Negroes do, are only now, after three generations, finally beginning to move into the middle class.

By contrast, Negroes began concentrating in the city less than two generations ago, and under much less favorable conditions. Although some Negroes have escaped poverty, few have been able to escape the urban ghetto.

This view is notable insofar as the problems in Ferguson stem from an opposite dynamic: it is a suburb with a majority-black population, something that the Kerner Commission would almost certainly have regarded as progress. Yet white flight to outer suburbs and to gentrifying cities left behind diminished tax

bases, and helped create conditions once thought to be confined to urban communities. The Kerner report recommended that local governments develop neighborhood task forces to facilitate communications, create better channels for registering and responding to grievances, and take steps to involve residents in the formulation of public policy. Before the efficacy of those ideas could be tested, Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated, sparking a new round of fire and bedlam in American cities.

Twenty-four years later saw the Los Angeles riots, which came in response to the acquittal of four white police officers in the beating of Rodney King, and culminated in more than sixty deaths and more than a billion dollars' worth of damage to the city. That beating had also prompted the formation of the Christopher Commission, assigned with, among other things, examining police brutality within the L.A.P.D. That commission's report held that the use of excessive force was a significant issue, but it also noted that, of the eighteen hundred complaints lodged between 1986 and 1990, fourteen hundred were made against officers who had just one or two allegations against them. A hundred and eighty-three officers had four or more complaints against them. Forty-four officers were subject to six or more complaints, but their superiors generally reviewed them

favorably. The report conveyed the impression that the trouble within the L.A.P.D. was isolated to a small number of bad apples, to superiors who rewarded their behavior, and to an institutional culture that hadn't rooted them out. It prescribed essential but far from sweeping changes for the department.

Whatever the findings of Governor Nixon's commission, they will be complicated by the question, typically unspoken by public officials but prevalent nonetheless, of whether a single officer—in this case, Darren Wilson, who shot and killed Michael Brown—or even a local official authority, is ever ultimately to blame. Rudolph Giuliani voiced it, amid a heated exchange with



Michael Eric Dyson, on “Meet the Press,” charging that the real problem is “black-on-black” crime. “White police officers wouldn’t be there if you weren’t killing each other,” he said. This argument may sound familiar to those who lived in New York City during Giuliani’s tenure as mayor. His administration witnessed several racially charged incidents in which police used lethal force, the most notable being the death, in 1999, of Amadou Diallo, the unarmed twenty-two-year-old Guinean immigrant who was shot nineteen times, in the vestibule of his Bronx apartment building. Giuliani defended the police, arguing, in effect, that, since minorities are disproportionately the victims of crime, they were protesting the very policies that were saving their lives. He also disparaged a U.S. Civil Rights Commission report that suggested that New York police officers were racially profiling people, saying that it bore “no relation to reality.”

Giuliani’s argument is a curious, if durable, one that would seem to suggest that the members of a community should themselves be responsible for correcting the behavior of other members of their demographic. (Nobody asks the same of the white population.) Eighteen per cent of the serious crimes reported in Ferguson between 2010 and 2012 occurred in a small area around the Canfield Green complex, where Michael Brown lived. The residents of that neighborhood

understand this fact intuitively, but that knowledge leaves them no better equipped to change it. For them, crime is not a statistic: it has a face, a particular corner it favors, an address, uncomfortably close to your own, where it opts to reside.

Forty-seven years ago, the Kerner Commission looked at the smoldering landscape of American cities and asked three questions: “What happened? Why did it happen? What can be done to prevent it from happening again?” These questions will no doubt animate Ferguson’s official inquiry. In 2010, blacks, who make up thirteen per cent of the nation’s population, composed fifty-five per cent of shooting homicide victims. By contrast, whites, who make up sixty-five per cent of the population, accounted for just twenty-five per cent of victims. This is not news to anyone, least of all to African-Americans, but its implications go unnoticed: effective policing is even more crucial to people who live in the Canfield Greens of this country. In the months leading up to the riots of Thanksgiving week, the plea from Ferguson was not for less policing but for more professional—indeed, more democratic—policing. The anger that spilled into the streets reflected not only the devaluing of black life but the grim recognition that African-Americans find themselves hemmed between the dangers of crime and the perils of those whom other communities can trust to protect them from it.

—*Jelani Cobb*

L.A. POSTCARD OPEN SECRETS



Gone are the baby pictures, gone is the Wall. The new social networks are intimate, ephemeral, and vague. They invite confessions, create improbable connections between strangers, and offer insight into the unvarnished thoughts of the seventeen-to-twenty-four-year-old American female; of active-duty military personnel; of Mormons. They don’t want to know your phone number, your e-mail address, or even your name. Unless you are coming to their headquarters, in which case they would like to take your picture, get your signature, and have you swear you will never disclose a single thing you saw there. Totally standard. Haven’t you ever been to Silicon Valley?

One fall night, one of the new social apps has a party. Shouldn’t say which one, but it starts with a “W” and rhymes with “hisper” (#iamtalkingaboutwhisper), and if geolocation services are activated on your phone—which is the only way to get the full range of services offered by the app, and is the option most users prefer—

you can see that it’s based in Venice, one street over from Snapchat (#oops).

What does the app do? It prompts you to post “a secret you’ve never told anyone.” For example, “I love the smell of my dog’s paws!” It lets people reply: “Wow I thought I was the only one.” In January, the company hired Neetzan Zimmerman, the viral-content maven who used to work at Gawker, to build an editorial team and strike up partnerships with publishers such as BuzzFeed and Jezebel. Using information collected from users’ posts—for instance, a sample of posts from military bases showed that the greatest number of mentions of P.T.S.D. came from Fort Hood—Zimmerman and other reporters have made news. They’ve also contacted anonymous secret-sharers and turned them into sources. Additionally, the editorial team promotes postings on urgent social issues like Gwyneth Paltrow’s marriage and Ebola.

There’s the C.E.O.! He’s twenty-seven, low-key, earnest, wearing a green cashmere sweater, and desperately craning his neck for his P.R. person. His name is Michael Heyward, and he has raised sixty million dollars in financing for the app, at a reported two-hundred-million-dollar valuation. His dad co-created “Inspector Gadget,” and he went to high school in Santa Monica with Evan Spiegel, the C.E.O. of

Snapchat. If Heyward had kids, he’d let them use the app. “There’s no safer place on the Internet than Whisper,” he says.

Why is he so stressed? Oh: the *Guardian*. Two reporters from the paper met with members of Whisper’s editorial team as part of a partnership deal. Then, in October, the *Guardian* published a report accusing Whisper of secretly “tracking” its users—even those who have opted out of geolocation services. Senator Jay Rockefeller, who chairs the committee overseeing the Federal Trade Commission, wrote to Heyward asking for an explanation. He noted, “It is questionable, at best, whether users seeking to post anonymously on the ‘safest place on the internet’ would expect that WhisperText has information-sharing relationships with third parties such as media organizations.”

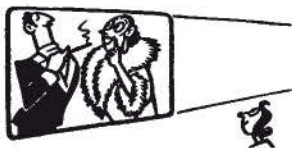
“What do you mean?” Heyward says at the party. “I’ve already spoken about this. I’ve said it to everyone. We have nothing to hide.” The map on the app showing the “locations” of users who opt in to G.P.S. is fuzzed to within five hundred metres, he explains. The I.P. addresses for the posts are stored only for a week, and are an imprecise tool for identifying individual users, except, maybe, in the hands of law enforcement, with which the app cooperates. He’s still talking. “No, like, listen. At the end of the day, I know and our

employees know what we do or don't do." The problem, he says, is that the *Guardian* reporters were there "undercover." Zimmerman has been placed on leave, pending an in-house investigation into unattributed quotes in the exposé. According to the *Guardian*, one of the Whisper people boasted that the company was watching the posts of a randy D.C. lobbyist. "He's a guy that we'll track for the rest of his life, and he'll have no idea we'll be watching him," he allegedly said. LOLcats, anyone?

Anyway, the party. Heyward leads the way to a London-style telephone booth painted liturgical purple, with the word "Confessional" over the door. Inside is a black receiver and an iPad. He picks up the receiver and says, "I'm having so much fun at the party." Later, his words post to the site, over an image of tea cakes. A woman, who doesn't want her name used, says, "Off the record, no other company provides the kind of access we do. We're a transparent company." Heyward mentions a post of his from earlier that day, complaining of a stomach ache. A second later, someone out there hearts it.

—Dana Goodyear

UP LIFE'S LADDER EARLY-BIRD SPECIAL



Growing up is hard work. The pains that come with learning to balance a checkbook can persist for decades. But the actor Adam Brody, who is best known for his role in the teen soap "The O.C."—he played Orange County, California's, comic-book-reading, indie-music-listening, yet somehow-still-chiselled Seth Cohen—seems to be settling contentedly into adulthood. "The O.C.," which premiered in 2003, went off the air seven years ago. Brody, who turns thirty-five this month, was in Brooklyn recently, shooting a Neil LaBute TV show about incestuous step-siblings and promoting his new film, "Life Partners."

Having rejected a publicist's proposal that he spend the afternoon at Barcade, a Williamsburg beer joint with arcade games, Brody opted to "walk around." Off he set, southward from DUMBO along the Brooklyn waterfront. As he strolled, he

considered the "Adam Brody type." "I think it's been around long before me," he said. "White, male, brunet, kinda comedy, kinda drama, kinda Everyman; more famous actors would be Tom Hanks, John Cusack, Matthew Broderick. I think with Seth Cohen the Jewish thing was a twist." Dustin Hoffman?

Excerpt from a 2006 *Elle Girl* cover story: "Unless you're Amish, qualify for the senior citizens' menu at Denny's or live under a formidably sized rock, you know who twenty-six-year-old Adam Brody is." Brody scoffed. "I'm just so glad I'm not there anymore," he said. "The little I've seen of 'The O.C.' since, I can't even handle my voice." (Sarcastic, slightly nebbishy.)

In "Life Partners," Brody plays a sexy dermatologist who threatens the best-friendship of two women—one straight, played by Gillian Jacobs; one gay, played by Brody's real-life wife, Leighton Meester (herself a former teen-soap star, on "Gossip Girl"). His character clings to some of youth's vestiges—he has a soul patch and favors T-shirts with goofy messages: "Haikus are easy/ But sometimes they don't make sense/ Refrigerator." But Brody said that's not him. "I did have a phase, fifteen years ago, of going to the vintage stores and buying used shirts that say stuff"—for example, "The Crab Shack"—"but I've grown out of it," he said, as he turned east onto Atlantic Avenue. "By and large, I've been wearing just Hanes white T-shirts—I buy them at Rite Aid."

Brody grew up near San Diego, in "a very nice suburb" where there were not many Jewish kids. "I was a little embarrassed of it, then I got to show business and it was, like, Jewish writers—let me tell your story!" He was a surf-and-skate bum back then; he sported a blond Afro ("Just from the sun") and pierced his own eyebrow ("I think I got it most of the way through and left it there for a week"). Which is to say, he got beat up less than his TV counterpart, whom *Time* once called Mr. Adorkable.

A few years ago, Brody was enlisted by Whit Stillman to be among the director's newest crop of Waspy stammerers. In the film "Damsels in Distress," he plays a "playboy or operator"; in the Amazon pilot "The Cosmopolitans," he's an ex-pat warming seats in Saint-Germain cafés. Brody said of Stillman, "More than anyone else I've worked with, I get self-conscious around him, because I

worry he'll realize I'm not as sophisticated as he thinks. He's coming from this Ivy League, and I didn't go to college."

At around 5 P.M., Brody ducked into a Brooklyn Heights diner and described life in L.A., where he has a house by the beach: "I drive through Hollywood, and it feels like driving through your high school." He studied the menu. "I almost don't trust a five-ninety-five B.L.T." He ordered a tuna melt with fries.

"American cheese, Cheddar, or Swiss?" the waitress asked.



Adam Brody

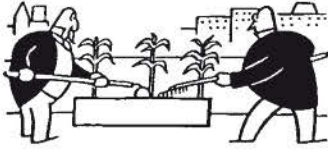
Brody considered. "Let's go Swiss. Let's be sophisticated."

While settling on bread (rye), fries (steak), and beverage (tea), he scratched at his facial scruff—the amount one cultivates to prove that one can—and talked about what he has yet to accomplish on-screen. "I died in 'The League.' I died in 'Scream 4.' But who doesn't want a heroic, tragic death where everybody's crying? I'm just, like, cannon fodder."

He pondered the paparazzi's fascination with his marriage to Meester—two teen heartthrobs, grown up: "Is there any escape? I think the older we get, the less interest there will be. So, time. You also make yourself scarce. We're homebodies." (They're most often photographed walking their dogs, Penny, a pit mix, and a dachshund named Trudy, who sleep in their bed.) Brody has played drums in indie bands, but these days, he said, "I'm taking piano lessons." He polished off a plastic cup of coleslaw. "And I want to learn how to cook. I'm still on omelettes. But I'm not worried. I have a good palate. Now I've just gotta work up to the meat."

—Emma Allen

BOB'S BOYS ALL NATURAL



My father was the first entrepreneur in the family,” Rohan Marley, the sixth of Bob Marley’s eleven children, said the other day. “He started his own record label, his own restaurant. He knew that, in order to give something back to the people, he had to create. You can’t be no philanthropist, no Warren Buffett, unless you make something first.”

Rohan, who is forty-two, is also an entrepreneur. He has a leadership role in several of his family’s businesses, including House of Marley (headphones, speakers), Zion Rootswear (T-shirts, onesies), and Marley Coffee. The family’s newest venture, which will launch next year, is called Marley Natural. “It’s a particular plant,” Rohan said, of the company’s inventory. “One that grows naturally next to the mango tree, the mint, the paprika. The Hindu sages speak of it. The rabbis speak of it.” It is marijuana.

Marley Natural is a partnership between the Marley estate and Privateer Holdings, “a private equity firm shaping the future of the legal cannabis industry.” (Privateer owns one of the largest providers of medical marijuana in Canada.) In a video on MarleyNatural.com, a camera

rushes toward verdant mountains. “He advocates for the positive power of the herb,” a voice-over says. Bob Marley, in archival footage, flips his dreadlocks. The logo is a Lion of Judah between two green leaves.

Rohan, who recently shaved his dreadlocks, wore a ruffled white shirt and a porkpie hat. He sat in the company’s new office, on the Bowery. Around the table were Brendan Kennedy, the C.E.O. of Privateer, and James Estime, Marley’s valet. “Three Little Birds” played on a House of Marley stereo. “James, turn the music down,” Rohan said. Estime, a burly man wearing a winter vest, picked up Marley’s iPhone and lowered the volume.

Marley grew up in Jamaica, and moved to the U.S. at the age of twelve. He was a star linebacker at the University of Miami, even though he was shorter than most of his teammates, who included Ray Lewis and Dwayne (the Rock) Johnson. (“Bob’s boys, we’re not scared of tall mountains,” Marley said.) Later, he toured with the Melody Makers, his siblings’ reggae band. “I was practicing to become a drummer,” Marley said. “Unfortunately, at that time I was with a woman who thought my drumming was shit. She killed my spirit to be a musician.” Her name is Lauryn Hill. They are no longer together. In 1999, he bought a coffee plantation in Jamaica.

Meanwhile, Kennedy got an M.B.A. from Yale and worked for an affiliate of Silicon Valley Bank. “My job was to study niche industries,” Kennedy said. “One day, I heard a pitch from a company in the

medical-cannabis space, and I went, ‘This is a forty-billion-dollar market, and no one’s taking it seriously.’ He left the bank and started Privateer.

“We’d been approached by one million people about selling Bob Marley pipes, lighters, you name it,” Marley said. The Marleys turned them all down, until Creative Artists Agency, which represents the family, set up a meeting with Privateer. “When I met this guy”—he gestured toward Kennedy—“I knew: This is the man.” Kennedy shrugged appreciatively.

“We’re looking at four to six botanical strains, at first,” Kennedy said.

“The quality of the herb is very important to us,” Marley said. Marley Natural plans to sell smokable cannabis in countries where it is legal—the Netherlands, Uruguay—and, perhaps, in Colorado, Washington State, Oregon, and Alaska. “We’ll also offer a line of topical creams,” Kennedy said.

A Privateer employee interrupted with a bit of news: the Oxford English Dictionary had just named “vape” the word of the year. A plan was formed: a trip to a nearby vaping lounge, where e-cigarettes are sold and sampled. Marley Natural plans to carry smoking accessories, and Kennedy believes in market research.

“You guys go,” Marley said. “It’s too cold for that shit.” Eventually, he was persuaded. Estime helped him with his coat.

At the Henley Vaporium, in Nolita, Marley sat at the “e-cig bar” and browsed a menu of flavors—Psychotherapy, Stop and Frisk, Cereal Killa. Justin Haber, the “vapologist” on duty, took apart an e-cigarette to show how it worked.

“Can you smoke anything you want out of that?” Kennedy asked.

Haber stiffened. “Hypothetically, if you had the proper—why are you asking?”

“Don’t worry, brother,” Marley said. “We’re starting a company, selling the herb aboveboard. Called Marley Natural. I’m one of Bob’s boys, you understand?”

Haber arched his brows. “All legal?”

“Hundred per cent,” Marley said.

“In that case, fuck yeah,” Haber said. “A couple drops of hash oil in the tank, you’re good to go. Just be careful—that shit hits you like a Mack truck to the face.”

Marley laughed. “Let me try that American Pie flavor, brother,” he said.

—Andrew Marantz



“I got hot.”

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

OBAMACARE'S INERTIA PROBLEM

Obamacare has had a rough month: it's being challenged in a Supreme Court case; House Republicans are trying to undermine it with a lawsuit; and its poll numbers are terrible. But on the ground the Affordable Care Act—which is starting its second open-enrollment period—looks robust. Most people in the program say they're happy with their plans, and new insurers are entering the market. Prices are pretty good, too: estimates suggest that premiums for the second-cheapest of the "silver" plans, which is the benchmark used to set subsidies, have risen by an average of just two to five per cent. Still, one fundamental challenge remains: if Obamacare is to succeed in holding down premiums over the long run, it needs consumers to shop around.

People have no difficulty comparison-shopping and changing allegiance when it comes to, say, automobiles or consumer electronics. Companies in those markets face huge pressure to keep quality high and prices low. But there are also markets where consumers tend to stick with the same choice forever, even though switching could save them quite a bit of money. Energy bills are a classic example. We've long been told we can save money by leaving incumbent providers for newer upstarts, but the vast majority of us haven't. Economists call it consumer inertia, and you can see it in many fields, including banking, credit cards, and health insurance. "History tells us that people are very sticky about health insurance," Larry Levitt, a senior vice-president at the Kaiser Foundation, told me. "If you look at federal employees or at Medicare Part D, people generally don't switch plans from year to year."

When people first sign up for health insurance, price matters a good deal—most Obamacare enrollees chose lower-cost, higher-deductible plans. But inertia quickly takes hold. When the Netherlands introduced managed competition for insurers, in 2006, almost twenty per cent of the insured switched after a year. But, by 2012, less than four per cent did. Karen Lamiraud, an economics professor at ESSEC Business School, studied the insurance market in Switzerland and found that the average switch rate between 1997 and 2007 was three per cent. Such inertia can be expensive. Ben Handel, an economist at Berkeley, did a study of the insurance choices made by eighty-five hundred employees at a big company, and found that most ended up staying with their default option, even when it cost them serious money. "Consumers leave thousands of dollars a year on the table because of inertia," he told me.

The key problem is what economists call switching costs. Sometimes they are tangible: if you want to get out of your cell-

phone contract, you'll have to pay a penalty. More insidious is what Handel calls "hassle costs"—the time and energy required to do enough research to make an informed switch. These are especially high when products and services are complicated and confusing, as with banking and health insurance, and when there are lots of potential options, which amplify people's anxieties about making a bad choice. "The complexity is daunting, and these things just aren't intrinsically interesting to most people," Handel said. Obamacare has an extra layer of complexity, since you have to take subsidies and taxes into account. And since different insurers use different networks, getting a better deal often means finding a new doctor—a big disincentive.

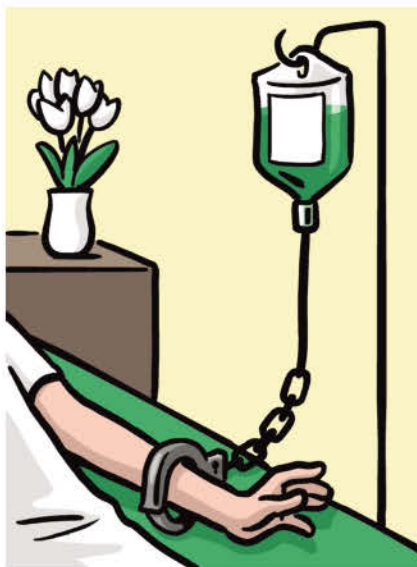
When switching costs are high, it's much easier for companies to raise prices. If you have a storage unit, you may well have been lured by an attractive monthly rate, only to find that it soon started rising by significant increments. (What are you going to do? Move all your stuff?) Similarly, even

though there are lots of affordable new Obamacare plans this year, many of last year's are raising premiums substantially. Lamiraud's study found that in Switzerland the gap between the most expensive health plans and the cheapest didn't narrow over time, which doesn't suggest much price sensitivity.

There are some things about the A.C.A. that may limit inertia's impact. The market for individual insurance has a lot of churn (people come in and out as they get and lose jobs, for instance), and, because new entrants pay attention to price, insurers have some incentive to keep prices reasonable. Many recipients, too, have relatively low incomes, which may make them likelier to scrutinize price. But the system also has a major feature that encourages inertia: your plan renews automatically each year if you do nothing. That's crucial for getting people to stay insured, but it will keep a lot of people on plans that weren't the best value they could have found.

So how do you combat this? More information is a start. One study Handel conducted found that "fully informed" consumers saved a couple of thousand dollars compared with those who were less well informed. But merely making information available isn't enough: you have to confront people with it. In one experimental study, when Medicare Part D consumers got a letter telling them that they could save money by changing plans the chance of their actually doing so rose by almost fifty per cent. Decision-support companies, which analyze huge tranches of data in order to come up with personalized rankings of insurance plans, could work with the Obamacare exchanges. That probably won't make insurers very happy, but it should please taxpayers. We're going to pay most of the bill when Obamacare recipients make poor choices. So we should do all we can to help them make better ones.

—James Surowiecki



LETTER FROM GAZIANTEP

THE VORTEX

A Turkish city on the frontier of Syria's war.

BY ROBIN WRIGHT

Gaziantep, a city in southern Turkey some forty miles from the Syrian border, has become a bustling hub at the center of the Middle East's latest conflict. It's a destination for spies and refugees, insurgent fighters and rebel leaders, foreign-aid workers and covert jihadists—all enmeshed in Syria's multisided war.

I recently drove to one of Gaziantep's

occasional artillery shells landed in Turkey.) Now the fighters of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham, a.k.a. ISIS or ISIL, are also just across the border, less than an hour away. During an inspection visit in October, NATO's Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg, told American troops manning the missiles, "Your mission is more important than ever."

a Popeyes, an Arby's, a KFC, a McDonald's, a Burger King, and a Starbucks. In October, "Fury," with Brad Pitt, played at the cinema. I watched a red Lamborghini as it roared down a wide boulevard.

For years, Turkey maintained cordial relations with Syria—the shared border is five hundred miles long—as part of a "zero problems with neighbors" policy. In 2008, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was then Prime Minister, welcomed the vacationing Assad family at an Aegean resort. But not long after the Syrian uprising began, in 2011, Erdoğan declared, "It is not heroism to fight against your own people." He urged Assad to step down, "for the welfare of your country, as well as the region."



Refugees inside the Turkish border near Gaziantep. Some ten million people have fled Syria or been displaced from their homes.

upscale neighborhoods, an area of pastel apartment blocks with balconies, and took pictures of American Patriot-missile batteries on a nearby hillside. They were pointed at Syria. The missiles were deployed, last year, to defend against Scuds fired at rebel militias by the government of Bashar al-Assad. (Several Scuds had struck close to the border, and

Until this summer, when ISIS began seizing large portions of Syria and Iraq, Gaziantep—or Antep, as the locals call it—was best known for its baklava. The city's 1.5 million inhabitants have thrived as Turkey's economic boom during the past decade brought rapid development to the Anatolian hinterlands. The Forum Mall, which opened last year, has

Since then, Turkey has done more than any other nation to harbor Syria's political and military opposition. Gaziantep is now home to the nascent Syrian Interim Government. Leaders of the Supreme Military Council and rebel commanders of the Free Syrian Army are regular visitors. The United Nations runs aid missions from Gaziantep, as do

OZAN KOSE/AFP/GETTY

several other international organizations and a number of businesses.

Gaziantep is particularly important to the United States. Washington closed its Embassy in Damascus in early 2012, and most American aid operations involving Syria are now directed from southern Turkey. The American effort includes three billion dollars in humanitarian assistance, such as food and medical aid, not only to refugees but also to Syrians inside the country. The United States has spent two hundred million dollars on everything from garbage trucks and ambulances to communications gear in order to prop up local councils struggling to provide essential services in rebel-held areas. An additional ninety million dollars has gone to equip armed opposition groups with nonlethal matériel, from trucks to ready-made meals. But there is no U.S. consulate, or even rented diplomatic office space, for American officials in Gaziantep, because of perceived dangers.

For more than two years, Turkey allowed entry to thousands of foreigners, from dozens of countries, who ended up crossing the border to fight alongside the rebels. Young men disembarked at Gaziantep's little airport and drove down the road to join the war. Some of them were Turks, including lawyers, students, merchants, even government employees. Earlier this year, though, after ISIS began attacking rebel groups and seizing Syrian territory that the rebels had liberated, the Turkish government clamped down; it claims to have deported a thousand would-be European jihadists and put six thousand others on a no-entry list. Even so, during the past two months, hundreds of men—and a few women—have reportedly crossed the frontier to join the jihadists.

This summer, ISIS was widely believed to have penetrated Gaziantep. In October, police, in two separate raids in Gaziantep Province, seized twenty-nine suicide vests, three hundred and thirty pounds of C-4 explosives, grenades and other explosives, and Kalashnikovs. Americans in Gaziantep have been warned that ISIS operatives are tracking the activities of Westerners. U.S. officials remain in the city only a few days, or even a few hours, as they carry out their mis-

sions. A senior State Department official who was visiting the city told me that if he came under attack there his only option would be to hide under his hotel bed.

This fall, U.S. officials came to Gaziantep to brief Americans working for nongovernment agencies. The advice was blunt: Keep a low profile. Don't gather in groups in public places. Don't wear sports or university insignia that would advertise nationality. Stay away from Starbucks.

"Gaziantep is a workaday city, not a cosmopolitan place, even though it's prosperous," a young employee of an American contractor based there told me. "Now it's been thrust into this weird world spotlight—as if Oklahoma City were suddenly on the front line of some international conflict."

One morning in late October, I drove from Gaziantep to the border overlooking Kobani, a Syrian town that ISIS has besieged since mid-September. Until then, the place was known mainly for its Ottoman-era train station, as a stop on the Berlin-Baghdad railway. Local lore claims that its name comes from the Germans who built the railway—from *Kompanie*, for "company," or *Bahn*, for "train." The town that grew around the station, of some forty thousand inhabitants, attracted Armenian Christians escaping genocide in the early nineteen-hundreds, and, later, ethnic Kurds.

Kobani's railway line became a boundary in the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, with which the British and the French secretly divided up the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. Eventually, Kobani was allocated to what would become the new state of Syria, and everything to the north went to Turkey. The borders on the map were arbitrary then, and ISIS is determined to destroy them now. By taking Kobani, it could extend its proclaimed Islamic Caliphate right up to the Turkish border. The siege of a once-obscure town didn't attract much attention until the United States launched its first air strikes, in late September, transforming what had been a footnote in the war into a test of American might against the jihadist onslaught.

On a rocky hilltop on the Turkish

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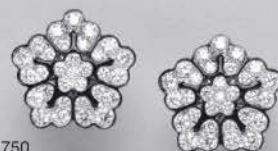
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Ana Juan, February 8, 2010

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side of the border, photographers, journalists, and Syrian refugees often gather to watch as Kurdish fighters battle ISIS for control of the town, a few hundred yards below. I sat next to Hamid Muslim, an eighty-four-year-old Syrian Kurd. His cane lay beside him. The air around us was noisy with the buzz of warplanes, spy planes, and drones, mostly American, punctuated by bursts of automatic rifle fire and mortar explosions.

Hamid pointed with his cane toward the western part of Kobani, where he had lived and run a vegetable shop. "We closed the door and left everything behind," he said. He had come to see what was still standing. Other refugees passed around an old pair of binoculars to check on their homes. Many were simple cinder-block buildings. The fighting, often house to house, even room to room, had caused vast destruction.

The first U.S. air strike of the day hit just before noon. We could feel its impact up on the hill. A charcoal-colored cloud mushroomed over the town.

Hamid wasn't impressed. "It doesn't seem like they're really striking ISIS," he said. "If they were, like this"—he picked up a large rock and pounded it repeatedly against a stone on the ground—"then ISIS wouldn't be there anymore. They're only hitting empty places—and not very often."

There were four other air strikes on Kobani that day, as part of Operation Inherent Resolve, as the U.S. effort is officially known. A communiqué from Central Command said, "The destruction of ISIL targets in Syria and Iraq further limits the terrorist group's ability to project power and conduct operations."

The air strikes against Kobani—more than two hundred and ninety so far—have been costly: a Tomahawk cruise missile runs about \$1.2 million, not including the fuel, crew, and deployment of two American warships in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea from which they are fired. U.S. warplanes have dropped munitions, including Hellfire missiles, at about a hundred thousand dollars apiece, and Small Diameter Bombs, at thirty thousand apiece.

As for the warplanes, operating a B-1 bomber costs fifty-eight thousand dollars an hour. F-15E fighter bombers exceed thirty-nine thousand dollars an

hour. And the new F-22 Raptor, used for the first time in combat against ISIS in Syria, costs three hundred and fifty million dollars—plus sixty-eight thousand dollars an hour in the air.

Central Command reported that the five air strikes that day hit seven vehicles and one building occupied by ISIS. The air strikes were almost certainly hitting a lot of American matériel, too. ISIS's artillery and tanks—worth hundreds of millions of dollars—were seized from the Iraqi Army, after four of its divisions disintegrated, in June.

By mid-November, the ISIS blitzkrieg against Kobani had stalled. John Allen, the retired four-star Marine general who is the diplomatic head of the U.S.-led coalition of sixty nations, told *Milliyet*, a Turkish newspaper, that "the situation has largely stabilized" in Kobani, and that "ISIL will find that it is not going to be successful there." Unlike the Iraqi Army, the Kurds had mostly vintage arms, but they refused to cut and run. ISIS suffered heavy casualties—reportedly more than six hundred fighters, with bodies left rotting on the ground for days. Its communications were also disrupted, its mobility restricted. A top State Department official predicted, "We'll get rid of ISIL sooner than people expect."

Yet, as I could see from the hilltop, ISIS still held sections of the depopulated town. It outgunned the Kurdish militia. It adopted new tactics, too. With multimillion-dollar surveillance aircraft



circling overhead, its fighters ignited piles of tires, spewing thick plumes of black smoke that obscured their movements. A black ISIS flag billowed in the wind atop a building in the heart of the town.

"Syria is the most complicated war in the Middle East in the last one hundred years," Anne Patterson, the Assistant Secretary of State in charge of Middle East policy, told me after she re-

turned from Gaziantep. Later, in an e-mail, she added, "The Syria crisis defies simple solutions. But we have an obligation, based on our national-security interests in the region and as leaders of the international community with humanitarian obligations, to help bring it to an end."

The United States wants a friendly government in Syria. Although Syria has limited natural resources, it has long been at the Middle East's strategic crossroads. Its borders—with Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel—give it leverage that Damascus has been able to exploit for political purposes. Syria's ethnic and religious diversity also makes it vulnerable to exploitation by regional sectarian powers. An end to the war and a political transition in Damascus could have more of an impact in the Middle East than the ouster of Saddam Hussein or the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt.

"Syria, by itself, is not actually worth much," Steven Cook, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said. "But it's been at the center of every strategic issue: the Arab-Israeli conflict; stability in Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan; Iran's influence; and Arab political unity." He went on, "Since its own war started, Syria has become the vortex. The conflict has every pathology in the region—extremism, foreign fighters, proxy wars, great-power competition, sectarian violence. And now it's sucking in everyone else on its borders."

Syria has been the most divisive foreign-policy issue within the Obama Administration. During the President's first six years in office, he seemed determined to keep a low profile in the Middle East, fulfilling his campaign promises to end the U.S. occupation of Iraq and wind down the war in Afghanistan. In 2012, he resisted intense pressure from a powerful quartet—Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, the C.I.A. director David Petraeus, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Martin Dempsey—to provide arms and training to Syrian rebels.

Disagreements over policy grew so deep that two top Syria specialists at the State Department quit. "To me, it was obvious that that strategy wasn't working," Robert Ford, the most recent

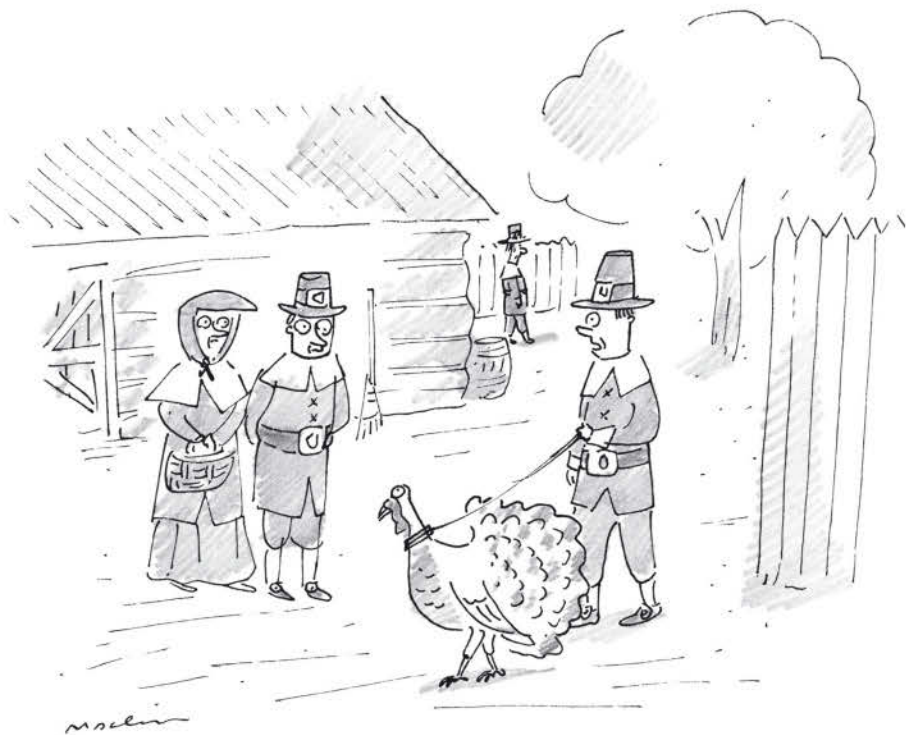
U.S. Ambassador to Syria, told me. He agreed to stay on through the acrimonious diplomatic talks in Geneva, last January and February, between Assad aides and the opposition. “But then I could no longer defend the policy. It was beginning to stain my personal integrity.”

As recently as August, the President was publicly skeptical of giving the rebels military assistance. With “respect to Syria,” he told the *Times*, the idea that arming the rebels would have made a crucial difference has “always been a fantasy. This idea that we could provide some light arms or even more sophisticated arms to what was essentially an opposition made up of former doctors, farmers, pharmacists and so forth, and that they were going to be able to battle not only a well-armed state but also a well-armed state backed by Russia, backed by Iran, a battle-hardened Hezbollah, that was never in the cards.”

Frederic C. Hof, a former State Department special adviser on Syria, who resigned in 2012, told me that “Obama has seen Syria as the problem from hell. There’s no magic bullet, and there is no fairy dust, so he has just wanted this problem to disappear from his in-box.”

Obama had authorized humanitarian and nonlethal aid to the Syrian opposition in the spring of 2012. Two dozen Americans are now part of the Syria Transition Assistance Response Team, or START. The program is operated primarily by teams rotating in and out of Gaziantep. A State Department official who has worked on aid programs in war zones and natural disasters told me, “This is the toughest assignment I’ve ever had. We’re trying to provide help to brave Syrians to keep their communities running, but we can’t go inside to make sure that it’s working. We’re doing our best in very dangerous circumstances, sometimes remotely.”

More than two hundred thousand Syrians have been killed in the war. More than ten million—almost half the population—have fled the country or been forcibly displaced from their homes. More than half of the refugees are children, according to UNICEF. “The scale of the human tragedy in Syria is among the most brutal of any conflict since the end of the Second World



“He’s a rescue.”

War,” Raul Rosende, who is the deputy U.N. humanitarian-aid coordinator for Syria, told me. Turkey has taken in 1.6 million refugees, including three hundred thousand in Gaziantep; more cross the border every day. At the Arin Mirxan camp, near Kobani, I found more than three thousand people squeezed into four hundred gray tents. Kids, who were idling in dirt alleys, raced over to talk to me through the wire fence; there’s little else to do. It was one of four new camps within a few miles of one another, established since the assault on Kobani.

At least three million Syrian children are no longer in school. “We fear this will be a lost generation, not only because they are not in school but because a lot of the new gangs will turn them into criminals or extremists,” Fawaz Mahmoud, the Syrian Interim Government’s deputy minister of education, told me. “It’s like the ground. Whatever you seed, you will grow. And the ground in Syria is horrible right now.”

For aid workers, the risks are extreme. Abdul-Rahman Peter Kassig, a former Army Ranger who had served in Iraq, returned to the region in 2012,

as an emergency medical technician, to help Syrian refugees in Lebanon. In mid-2013, he moved his aid organization, SERA, or Special Emergency Response and Assistance, to Gaziantep. On October 1, 2013, he was abducted by ISIS after he drove an ambulance packed with medical supplies across the border en route to Deir Ezzor, in eastern Syria. He was beheaded by ISIS last month. Two other aid workers, David Haines and Alan Henning, both British, were beheaded earlier in the fall. The lone American still reportedly held by ISIS, a woman, is also an aid worker.

American aid has produced ethical dilemmas as well as risks. Aid earmarked for local councils had been going to four northern Syrian provinces—Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, Aleppo, and Idlib—where rebels had taken significant territory from Assad’s forces. This summer, however, ISIS seized much of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor.

The losses sparked a debate in Washington, but the aid continued to flow in. “The questions have been: Are we enabling ISIS?” the senior State Department

official told me. “Are we giving them sufficient aid that they can use their money to buy more guillotines? And would we starve people without food aid? It’s a tough conversation. It gives you a stomach ache.”

Around ten or fifteen per cent of the three million Syrians living in ISIS territory are surviving on international aid, according to Orhan Mohamad, the executive director of the Assistance Coördination Unit, run by the opposition and headquartered in Gaziantep. “There is the humanitarian concept and the political concept—and they clash with each other,” he said. “If we send food baskets to this area, it helps ISIS politically. But if you judge it by humanitarian values it is keeping a family alive. So it’s guilty-guilty. It is the Devil’s choice.”

The fate of U.S. humanitarian aid to the Syrian opposition mirrors the loss of American military equipment to ISIS. As the jihadists swept through northeastern Syria, they seized fire trucks, garbage trucks, ambulances, generators, water tanks, and rescue equipment that had been provided to local councils. The Islamic State’s takeover also put an end to U.S. stipends to pay for local schoolteachers. “We haven’t had a good day in a long time,” the senior State Department official said.

Administering aid from Gaziantep complicates accountability. Last December, Islamist fighters (not aligned with ISIS) seized warehouses in Atmeh, just inside Syria, containing a million dollars’ worth of American supplies. Washington suspended nonlethal aid to the rebels for six weeks. It also dismissed the Supreme Military Council as its chief conduit of aid to the rebels and selected its own group of a dozen or so Free Syrian Army commanders to channel the matériel.

One day, I drove to the nearest border crossing, at Kilis. The line of eighteen-wheel semis waiting to pass through the big steel gates was five miles long. Most Turkish truckers, once they get across, transfer their goods to Syrian drivers. And then, as one Turkish driver put it, “Who knows?”

The American government requires multiple forms of verification that the goods reach their intended recipients—via G.P.S. devices, pictures from destinations, signed receipts, and third-party reports. But Mohamad estimated that only sixty to seventy per cent of international aid gets to intended recipients. The rest is lost to scams and schemes by warlords, gangs, criminals, truck drivers, and even the needy, who apply for aid from multiple groups and then set up little businesses to sell off the surplus.

“A lot of aid is being sold, both in regime-controlled and opposition-controlled areas,” Assaad Al Achi, who works with the local coördination committees, told me. “You see it all the time on the streets in Idlib and Aleppo—canned food, flour, medical kits. Some still have logos from the World Food Program or Doctors Without Borders.”

U.S. officials downplay the problems, emphasizing the scope of need. “That always happens—stuff leaks out, people sell it,” Patterson said. “Look, you make a decision to give humanitarian aid, and on the broadest possible scale, and that’s what we’ve done here, and we can debate that, but, fundamentally, that’s what has been decided—to give it to anyone who is hungry.”

“It’s a war,” the senior State Department official said. “If some of it leaks to other Syrians, it’s fine. I say, ‘Don’t over-react when something goes wrong.’”

The premise of U.S. policy toward Syria is that the rebels need help in continuing to hold territory. The goal is to put sufficient pressure on Assad to eventually get him to meet the opposition at the negotiating table. “No one believes there is a military solution to this problem,” a senior Administration official told me. “We want to rebalance the situation on the ground. It’s not by making them”—the rebels—“militarily stronger, so that they can then march in and take over Damascus. We don’t believe that is how the story will end. We just want to insure that the regime can’t defeat the opposition.”

One evening in Gaziantep, as I was having coffee in the Divan Hotel, a new high-rise, the lobby began to overflow with burly men, their bodyguards, and Turkish secret police. More than two dozen rebel commanders of the Free Syrian Army had shown up, unannounced. Some were in silk suits. A paunchy commander-cum-sheikh wore a religious robe. Another commander wore a sweatsuit and a white Adidas cap; he held an iPhone tightly in his hand.

They were all from Aleppo, Syria’s largest city and commercial center before the war, and they had gathered for an emergency summit because of rising panic about Aleppo’s fate. “Kobani is just one little point of Syria, but Aleppo



“Can I start you all off with my cheesy alimony saga?”

is the economic center,” Mohammed al Obeid, a captain in the Tawhid Brigade in Deir Ezzor, told me. “It’s sixty per cent of our revolution. If Aleppo is lost, it will be regarded as the biggest loss of the revolution.”

The main threat to Aleppo is not from ISIS. Syria is the battlefield of two related conflicts. The first pits the Assad regime against rebels who emerged from a domestic popular uprising in 2011. The second pits the original rebels against extremist rivals, many of them non-Syrians, as in Kobani. As the world focussed on ISIS’s advances, the Assad regime escalated its offensive against opposition forces around Aleppo. In the past three years, Assad’s security forces have used most of the arms in their arsenal—missiles and chemical weapons, helicopter gunships and heavy artillery, even gunboats off the coast. They have also been using barrel bombs: do-it-yourself devices, which cost little and are made from oil drums, gas cylinders, or water tanks. Barrel bombs can be filled with all kinds of material: shrapnel fashioned from metal scraps, or nails and nuts and bolts, with chemicals, like chlorine, and nitrate fertilizer as an explosive to deliver payload. They are usually dropped on civilian areas from helicopters. They terrorize those they don’t kill.

If Assad’s forces succeed in encircling Aleppo, cutting off access to the highway to Turkey, the city could be starved into submission, as has happened elsewhere. “Abandoning Aleppo would mean condemning Syria to years of violence,” the French Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius, warned in an op-ed in the *Washington Post* last month. “It would mean the death of any political future. It would mean exporting Syria’s chaos to its already vulnerable Iraqi, Lebanese and Jordanian neighbors. It would mean the breakup of the country to be delivered up to increasingly radicalized warlords.”

One of the commanders at the emergency summit in Gaziantep was Sheikh Tawfiq Shahabuddin, who heads the Nureddin Zengi Movement, named for a legendary Syrian ruler during the Crusades. A big man with a beard, Shahabuddin wore a red-and-white kaffiyeh and fingered a set of dark-red prayer beads. “The situation is more

dangerous than ever before in Aleppo,” he told me. “We want help from American airpower. We need them”—the U.S. and its allies—“to strike the strategic sites of the regime, not just ISIS. We asked Congress and nations in the coalition to create a no-fly zone.” He added, “Otherwise, our efforts are wasted.”

The Free Syrian Army, which maintains a logistics office in Gaziantep, is not so much an army as it is an often dysfunctional umbrella for an array of militias, each with its own loyalties and commanders. The militias are named for martyrs of an area (the Idlib Martyrs’ Brigade), historic figures (Nureddin Zengi), religious tenets (Tawhid, or the Oneness of God), or political goals (Hazm, or Steadfastness). The F.S.A. was the largest alliance of Syrian rebels, but it has been eclipsed by more radical Islamist factions, such as Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front. More than a thousand militias, insurgent groups, warlords, and armed gangs are currently competing on the overlapping battlefronts. There’s been a lot of switching teams, too, depending on pay, local victories, and access to arms and ammunition.

At their peak, the rebels numbered more than a hundred thousand fighters, but only thirty to fifty thousand were affiliated with the F.S.A. The rebels have a strategy only in principle, with little operational coordination from town to town, and scant weaponry to defend against Assad’s airpower.

“Slowly, slowly, slowly, F.S.A. factions are being sucked into warlordism,” Achi, of the local coordination committees, said. “The main problem is that F.S.A. brigades were interested in liberating their village neighborhoods. But once they did that they sat and did nothing. They weren’t really interested in doing more.” He went on, “So groups, and even citizens, are becoming much more local about what is happening on their perimeter. Nationalism is completely dying. You’re going down to the smallest form of groupings. People now are going to their pre-civil-war identities—ethnic, sectarian, and so forth.” The F.S.A. is outnumbered by Assad’s security forces and outgunned by ISIS, which has about fifteen thousand fighters in Syria and the enormous

benefit of the captured U.S. weaponry.

Before the war, the Syrian Army had three hundred thousand men and women, but its roster has been severely depleted by those who have deserted, defected, or been killed. Assad now relies primarily on his core National Defense Forces, comprising more than fifty thousand personnel; his Air Force; paramilitary thugs, known as *shabiha*, or “apparitions”; and thousands of fighters from Lebanon’s Hezbollah.

The Pentagon, in an effort to build up allies on the ground, announced plans in September to train a new force of five thousand fighters with more sophisticated arms and tactics. The force is supposed to grow to fifteen thousand during the next three years. But the men have to be thoroughly vetted, so the program is not likely to begin until next year.

The C.I.A. has been running its own covert operation to train Syrian rebels, with support from Gulf countries. The United States has cooperated with Saudi Arabia to fund the training program, just as it did in the eighties to support the mujahideen anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan. The program has been personally brokered by the agency’s director, John Brennan, a former station chief in Riyadh, who speaks Arabic and has made several trips to the Gulf to negotiate details. A few hundred rebels have been trained to operate TOW anti-tank missiles. The C.I.A. is reportedly training four hundred fighters each month in secret camps in Jordan and Qatar. Small groups returning to Syria have had some success in the south, around Deraa, where the uprising against Assad began, and in sabotage attempts against the regime’s military.

Haiham Afisi, the deputy chief of staff of the F.S.A., dismisses the new American efforts to aid the rebels. A colonel who defected after thirty years in Assad’s Air Force, he has met with several U.S. officials, including Senator John McCain.

“It’s four or five months before they start, and then another four or five months to train,” he said. “The delay in the new force will allow the regime to advance. We face a real danger of losing the two provinces left, because now we are between ISIS and the regime, and

they are gaining ground. So a lot of people will die. A lot of places will be destroyed. And there will be many more refugees this time.” He paused. “We have become just numbers—not people,” he said. “Numbers of dead.”

Syria’s political opposition is also fragmented. The Syrian Opposition Coalition, which has more than a hundred members, sits in Istanbul, and is deeply divided, both politically and by regional sponsorship. (Saudi Arabia and Qatar, in particular, compete for influence.) Local-council activists accuse it of being out of touch with realities on the ground.

The coalition, in turn, elects the Syrian Interim Government, whose Prime Minister and cabinet are headquartered in Gaziantep. This year, they moved into an elegant four-story building, with wraparound balconies, on a leafy boulevard. “It looks like the Embassy of Switzerland!” Bassam Al Kuwatli, a Canadian-Syrian who moved to Gaziantep to help the opposition, said to me. “They should be working out of containers, like they do on gas and oil fields, and not wearing ties. People come from inside Syria, people who hardly have any food, and see all that luxury. It’s costing them politically.”

The interim government’s Prime Minister, Ahmad Tomeh, was first elected in September, 2013, and was dismissed, along with his cabinet, in July, 2014. He was reelected in October, but only after Saudi-supported coalition members didn’t vote. The coalition also brokers the Prime Minister’s cabinet, which is currently a caretaker body and has involved nasty politicking among the factions.

“Each party wanted a piece of it, so they’ve created a dysfunctional body,” Assaad Al Achi told me. “The minister of culture comes from a democratic background, and the minister of industry comes from the Muslim Brotherhood. They simply won’t talk to each other.” Tomeh is aligned with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and with the Qataris, who gave sixty million dollars to keep the interim government functioning. In July, one of its senior officials absconded with ninety thousand dollars allocated for its justice ministry.

“The Syrian opposition has failed, time and time again, to deliver a sustainable form of leadership,” Achi said.

Prime Minister Tomeh, a former dentist and political prisoner, acknowledged as much when we met at his office. “We as the opposition have made our mistakes,” he said. “We have not yet been able to learn the culture and very concept of democracy. One of the major illnesses that hit us after fifty years of dictatorship is that we lost the spirit of teamwork.”

I mentioned that people in his government are often criticized for sitting the war out in Gaziantep or Istanbul, rather than making their way back to Syria to govern in rebel-held areas.

“Oh, definitely our wish is to be inside Syria, but the security circumstances are very harsh,” Tomeh said. “We are always saying to the international community, ‘Before you blame us about why we’re not in Syria, why don’t you help us create a safe zone?’”

The opposition has long pressed for a no-fly zone, several miles deep, in northern Syria. The Obama Administration has so far rejected the idea. It would mean a major military operation against the Assad regime, which could be long and costly, even after clearing out radar, command-and-control centers, and forward military positions. (Enforcing the no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq after the first Gulf War cost the United States billions and, even after several years, did nothing to help the Iraqi opposition topple Saddam Hussein.)

The U.S. has refused to directly fund the interim government until it establishes a presence inside Syria. What concerns Washington is that no consensus opposition leader has yet emerged who can replace Assad. “Two generations of Assad rule have left Syrians without alternative leaders who can help guide them out of this terrible crisis,” a senior U.S. official told me. “There are no Nelson Mandelas, no Lech Walesas.”

One Friday, the beginning of the Muslim weekend, I went to the Original Aleppo Restaurant, a favorite hangout of Syrian refugees in Gaziantep. The pillars are painted pink; the tables are red plastic and chipped. A

photograph of Abdullah Faris, the owner’s young son, was hanging on the wall. He was killed by a missile in Aleppo in 2012, as he was talking by cell phone with his father.

The restaurant was filled with men between their late teens and their mid-thirties. Some had fought in Syria; only a few were fighting now.

“The revolution did a good job at first, but now everyone is fighting each other,” Ahmed, a nineteen-year-old barber from Aleppo, said. He wore a brown leather jacket. As he talked, others gathered around. They all had tales of how a rebel militia had disintegrated or been corrupted. Factories in opposition-controlled areas were raided, the goods taken to resell. Businessmen were extorted, effectively paying ransoms up front to avoid being taken hostage.

“The F.S.A. has lost a lot of trust,” Ahmed said. “People who once supported it don’t even know who the real F.S.A. is anymore.”

Many young Syrians who once took to the streets to protest Assad’s rule have lost the will to fight. The men complained that idealism was being replaced by disillusionment with profiteering warlords and petty politics. “The big problem in Aleppo is not weapons,” an opposition official who travels in and out of Syria from Gaziantep said. “For the first time, we don’t have enough fighters, because they’ve left or died, or we weren’t able to recruit. There are enough weapons to liberate the whole city. But there are not enough men.”

I asked the men in the restaurant whom they now supported.

“No one,” Ahmed replied.

His friend Abdul Hamid Jamal, who had fought with the Tawhid Brigade in Aleppo, pulled up the sleeve of his hoodie and showed scars from where he’d been shot in the elbow. Now he’s among a growing number of part-time or occasional fighters.

“A lot of people have lost at least one member of the family—they’re tired of the war,” he said, adding, “They’re less interested in fighting, because of the losses. That hurts the ability to fight either ISIS or the regime.”

I asked Ahmed how long he thought he’d be in Turkey.

“Maybe forever,” he said. ♦

A close-up portrait of Waka Flocka Flame. He has dark skin, dreadlocks, and a beard. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. His hands are raised towards his mouth, with fingers slightly curled. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows. The text "PINE BROS." is superimposed on his lower lip.

PINE BROS.

"Love your Brothers" – Waka Flocka Flame

THE DUGGAR FAMILY KAMA SUTRA

BY PAUL RUDNICK



Michelle and Jim Bob Duggar have homeschooled their nineteen children, and the entire devout Christian clan has appeared for nine seasons on TLC's "19 Kids and Counting." As the Duggar kids have matured, Jim Bob has allowed only chaperoned dates, and, as *People* has reported, "the Duggar girls and beaus have agreed to only 'side hugs' pre-engagement and only hand-holding post-engagement. Their first kisses will be on their wedding days."

For further guidance, the family has collaborated on a sex manual, excerpted here:

THE MISSIONARY POSITION

This is perhaps the most satisfying sexual maneuver, because the wife remains in America while the husband serves as a missionary along the Amazon. Both parties receive erotic pleasure

from choppy long-distance telephone conversations, in which the only understandable words are "prayer," "antibiotic gel," and "I've finally persuaded the entire tribe to wear cargo shorts and culottes, so there's no more of that flippity-floppity."

THE WHEELBARROW

Another Duggar favorite, in which the wife, while gardening and filling her wheelbarrow with homegrown yams, eggplants, and zucchini, imagines her husband's smile as she serves him a tasty mixed salad. When he is alone, the husband is permitted to caress these vegetables and offer them inexpensive jewelry in exchange for their continued silence.

THE THREEWAY

An advanced technique, in which a mom and her two grown daughters se-

cretly discuss divorcing their husbands, until orgasm.

SEX TOYS

By following the Duggars' example, marital aids can be sensibly repurposed. A simple vibrator can provide hours of feminine pleasure if you remove the batteries and use the plastic shell to store a sterilized toothbrush or a collection of small hoop earrings.

THE FAMILY ORGY

All family members must assemble in a great room or back yard. Each member is handed a Magic Marker and a square of oaktag, and asked to write down an activity that leads them to profound sensual arousal. On the count of three, everyone holds up their statements, revealing such options as "Vacuuming Underneath Large Pieces of Furniture," "Refinishing a Tag-Sale Find," and "Coaching Softball at the Nursing Home." If anyone's oaktag reads "Picturing My Girlfriend Wearing Knee-socks" or "Wondering What It Would Be Like If We Had HBO," then that family member will have a pentagram drawn on his or her forehead, and will receive only a single Pillsbury crescent roll at dinner.

THE LA-Z-BOY

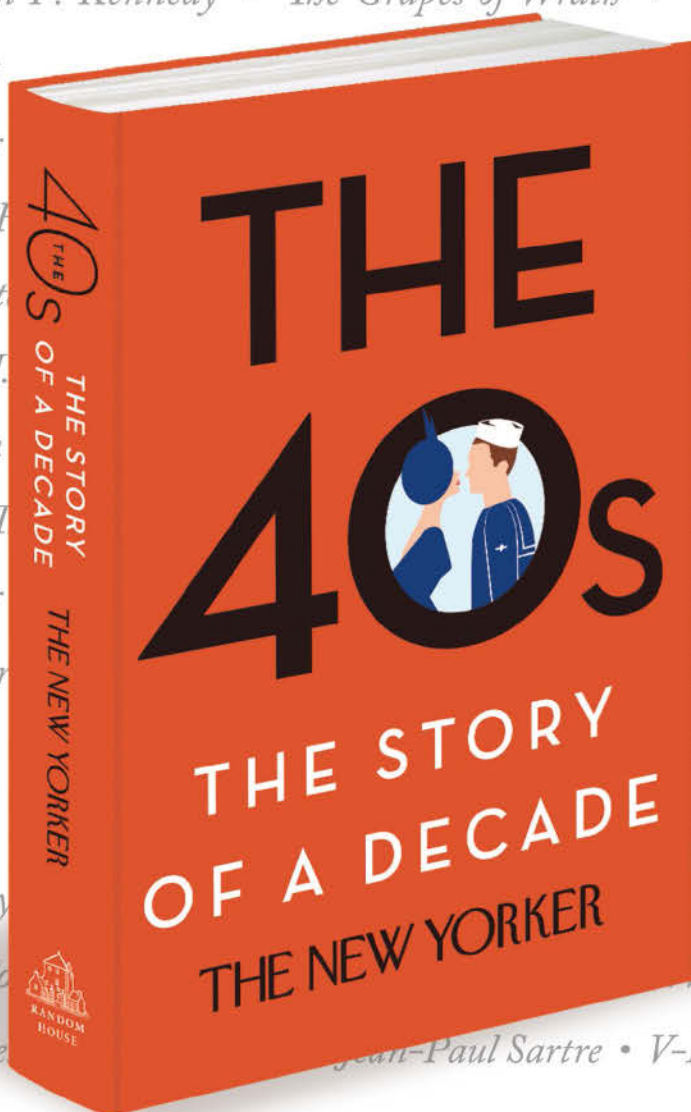
This technique is for only the most adventurous couples, as it involves the husband tilting his recliner all the way back, while the wife straddles the armrests and crochets a birthday scarf for her dad.

THE BABYMAKER

In order to reproduce, actual sexual intercourse may become necessary, but only according to the following parameters. Both partners will disrobe in total darkness and then move slowly toward each other, to avoid making love to a floor lamp. Once the spouses have found one another, they will apologize, hold their breath, and picture, in their minds, their mothers piling heaps of apple slices into a piecrust. After no more than thirty seconds of intimate contact, the wife will yell, "Marco!," and the husband will reply, "Polo!" Then both partners will run to separate bathrooms and scrub themselves with wire brushes, until a child is born. ♦

HISTORY IN REAL TIME AS TOLD BY THE NEW YORKER

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WITH NEW PERSPECTIVES FROM

Jill Lepore, George Packer, David Remnick, Zadie Smith, and many more.

THE VIEW FROM A BRIDGE

Shopping, tourism, and the changing face of luxury.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

The Pont des Arts, in Paris, is a steel-and-wood footbridge that connects Left Bank to Right—or, more important to its history and its name, connects the École des Beaux-Arts, where generations of French artists were told how to draw, to the Louvre, where generations went to find out how to look. It was, until relatively re-

twentieth century, interestingly mixed, with the newly cleaned Cour Carrée of the Louvre straight ahead and, just to the right, the shiplike prow of the Samaritaine department store, proudly flying a couple of pennants from its top.

In the past nine years, all that has changed. La Samaritaine, which for almost a century and a half represented

postmodern, glass-encased beacon meant for another kind of woman and another kind of happiness, and so finds itself pitted against preservationists who want neither postmodern glimmer nor luxury glitter—who want, in fact, the same damn happiness for the same damn women.

Meanwhile, the Pont des Arts groans beneath the weight of the “love locks” that have become a rashlike infestation on small Paris bridges in the past few years. Lovers buy cheap padlocks from lock sellers, scribble their initials on the lock, shackle the lock to the bridge’s railings, and then throw the key into the river. At first, there were a few, then there were a lot, and now they are everywhere, about



A plan to turn the old Samaritaine department store into a five-star hotel is at the center of a debate about what Paris is becoming.

cently, a soulful and solitary *passerelle*, where one could stand for hours in winter, mostly alone, staring out at the view west toward the older, stone parapet of the Pont Royal and the Eiffel Tower, or east toward Notre-Dame and the sharp-jawed Île de la Cité. The view north, toward the Right Bank, remained, until the end of the

the “Bonheur des Dames,” the “happiness of ladies” (a title that Zola used ironically, referring to the bourgeois pursuit of material goods in department stores), has closed. The store is emptied, mute and dark and flagless, its fourteen hundred employees gone, as the French luxury conglomerate L.V.M.H. struggles to turn it into a

three-quarters of a million in all, locks shackled to locks shackled to locks shackled to locks, every square inch of the bridge crowded with black initials, brass bodies. Earlier this year, some of the grillwork of the Pont des Arts collapsed under the weight of all that love. The city government has been slow to act, partly for the

usual exasperating French bureaucratic reasons—before something can actually be done, it must be decided if it is the administrative responsibility of the Prefecture of Police, of the Hôtel de Ville, or, perhaps, of the Ministry of Culture—and partly out of a genuine bewilderment over how to constrain the passionate gestures of tourists on whose illusions of Paris as the best place to declare one's love the city's economy ever more depends.

Two American women, not long ago tourists themselves, have emerged to energize and unleash the popular passion of Paris against the love locks. When Americans visit the bridge now, what there is to see is not the modern and the antique but another opposition: in the distance, the collapse of the grand bourgeois mercantile civilization of Paris and, straight ahead, the excrescences of mass tourism that have replaced it as a central Parisian industry. The view from the footbridge now, in the city that the American women came to savor and stayed to help save, offers a tight knot of paradoxes about the history of Paris, the tempering of glass, and the shackles of love.

In the late nineteenth century, Parisian department stores, which began as catchall indoor marketplaces, with individual venders selling drygoods, interbred with the glass exhibition palaces of the period to produce a new building type and a new idea of luxury: all the world's goods suspended on multiple floors under the natural light of a great, and usually decorated, glass ceiling. La Samaritaine—the name derives from a seventeenth-century fountain with a bas-relief of the Samaritan woman that used to stand nearby—began as one of these closed retail drygoods markets, colonizing, piece by piece, a miscellany of buildings between the Seine and the Rue de Rivoli; Printemps and the Galeries Lafayette emerged as rivals farther back on the *grands boulevards*. The stores gave an identity to the neighborhood and an idea of popular luxury to the world. La Samaritaine was, by general agreement, the most “popular” of the great stores, a sort of Macy's-plus, if one can imagine Macy's on the banks of the Seine with a view of a Gothic cathedral.

Then, at the beginning of this new century, the crisis in retailing that has struck the rest of the world struck Paris—the *grands magasins* had to do battle with what are called here *grandes surfaces*, the super-big-box retailers that, though kept by law largely to the periphery, are nonetheless good at drawing shoppers in for inexpensive furniture and appliances. Just as the Zola-era department store drove out of business all the small shops of the quartier—the Parisian shopping streets beloved of Americans are a much reduced version of the older kind, with only perishables surviving—so the *grandes surfaces* have been driving out the great department stores.

When L.V.M.H. (the name of the conglomerate, overseen by the tycoon Bernard Arnault, combines the initials of Louis Vuitton and Moët Hennessy, the suitcase maker and the champagne house) bought an interest in La Samaritaine, in 2001, it had already turned the Bon Marché, on the Left Bank, from a bourgeois store to a luxe one—from an Alexander's to a Bergdorf's. It faced a bigger project with La Samaritaine: to turn the familiar Seine-side building into a five-star hotel, with controlled access to the once famous roof terrace and restaurant. L.V.M.H. approached the Japanese architectural firm of Sanaa. The plan that Sanaa came up with, which also included retail space and low-income housing, was officially inspired by the building complex's original architect, Frantz Jourdain. Conceiving the project in Art Nouveau style, he left intact the various façades of the buildings on the Rue de Rivoli that it was recycled from. The renovation, the company announced, was “an opportunity to complete Frantz Jourdain's unfinished project to give La Samaritaine a single, immediately recognizable façade in the Rue de Rivoli.”

The most striking exterior feature of the new architectural model is a billowing, wavelike wall of translucent glass meant to unify the Rue de Rivoli side both by referring to the original *verrière* roof and by creating a single visual unit that pulls the façades together. This kind of oceanic glass front has become a signature, even a tic, of contemporary French architecture—including the many glass façades by Jean Nouvel and Christian de Portzamparc's twisted



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crystal tower at L.V.M.H.'s U.S. headquarters, on Fifty-seventh Street in Manhattan. The glass façade suggests, in turn, the long French infatuation with glass walls—prismatic, waving, billowing, or bending—as the symbol and material of modernity or, in this case, postmodernity.

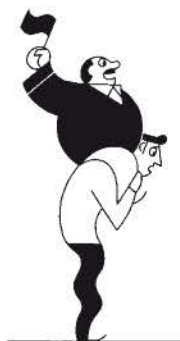
Beautiful though the Samaritaine façade promises to be, its critics think that it distracts from the reality that the L.V.M.H. plan, centered on a new hotel, would make the old department store one more luxury destination for Paris transients, rather than a regular retailer for Paris residents. This transformation increased Parisians' natural suspicion of Arnault's enterprise—L.V.M.H. having become, to its doubters, a kind of sinister luxury-goods octopus, a monopoly vender of French brands to ascending Asia. When preparatory work began on the Sanaa design, two years ago, preservationists sued. The first level of French magistrates temporarily revoked L.V.M.H.'s building permit, then L.V.M.H. appealed, and the case now rests with the Cour d'Appel, which is expected to rule in early December.

"Sanaa won the Pritzker prize, of course," Marie-Line Antonios, of La Samaritaine, says, a little defensively. Spokesmen for La Samaritaine always emphasize the Pritzker, rather in the way that beauty-pageant hosts in America emphasize all the college scholarships the contestants are winning, trying to make it plain that what may look like dazzle is really virtue.

Antonios is the *directrice générale* of the Samaritaine project, which means that, right now, she is the executive who is charged with not running a big department store. Originally from Lebanon, she can be found these days at offices on the Left Bank, on the Rue Saint-André-des-Arts: a sort of Samaritaine in exile, as she and her team wait for the government to allow them to complete the renovation. She has the weary, guarded look of someone who has been cornered and harried at every turn by self-righteous

preservationists and self-important city bureaucrats.

"L.V.M.H. is the sort of name that is an easy target," she says with a sigh. "Everyone feels that L.V.M.H. can do what it wants, when in truth it's just the opposite. It would be much easier to do this if it *weren't* L.V.M.H." She explains that the complexity of the project was necessitated by the history of La Samaritaine, assembled, as it was, from bits and pieces of older buildings. "On the Rue de Rivoli side, there were seventeenth- and eighteenth-century buildings, but they were all destroyed and adapted to commerce long ago. It is a *mélange*, with false façades. But the opponents couldn't accept having even those demolished. The patrimony fights against *all* projects in Paris."



She frowns. "We obtained the building permit for the program in December, 2012, and we worked for seventeen months—but it's worse than in New York, the rules, and we had to stop in May, 2014, and then last week we won the right to begin again. But that's a provisional decision. The final one we'll have in December. So it's taken seven years to get the consent, and then have it revoked. But, if all goes well, in 2018 we'll be finished. Let's remember: everything facing the Seine will be unchanged—everything!"

It's true that only the mostly nondescript Rue de Rivoli side will be glassed over. But while the nineteenth-century glass was largely functional, letting in light, the new façade is mostly symbolic, trapping light. Not surprisingly, Christian de Portzamparc has published a letter in *Le Monde* in praise of that aspect of it: "A disparate façade on the Rue de Rivoli is transformed and unified into an undulant, diaphanous one, bringing light and loveliness to this part of the street." The only reason to oppose it, he maintained, "would be to declare the absolute authority of the past"—to declare that "everything old is sacred and untouchable and no place at all exists for our time."

"The world has changed," Antonios goes on, explaining why a "popular" department store is no longer plausi-

ble in central Paris. "The problem with *grands magasins* is the cost of property and personnel, the cost of human resources. The only way to afford those is to make a luxury store. The classic discount stores, the 'good buy' stores—they don't exist anymore. They can't."

One of the oddities of the moment is that most Parisians, particularly ones who are hyper-aware of urbanist issues, tend to be merely dismissive of the love locks, even as the locks threaten to pull bridges down into the water and onto the heads of the tourists passing by in boats below. When *Le Monde* noticed the hard-to-miss pairing at the bridge, it characterized the opposition to the glass façade as a potential tragedy, Paris once again losing out on an architectural advance, with the locks on the bridge more farcical, confronted, quixotically, by "two New York women now settled in Paris." "We can't be repressive in the City of Love," Bruno Julliard, the first deputy mayor of Paris, blithely announced not long ago, speaking of the love locks. "It's an image problem concerning the tourists. It may be best just to wait until the fashion passes."

This kind of indifference makes it hard for the two American campaigners, Lisa Anselmo and Lisa Taylor-Huff, to keep their equanimity when you meet them on the Pont des Arts. When they see lock sellers brazenly offering locks to dim-witted tourists, they almost go crazy. The bridge has become even uglier, as the city government, to protect against more love locks, has hurriedly placed plywood panels in front of the railings, while the plywood panels, in turn, are spray-painted with graffiti, recalling to a New Yorker the interiors of subway cars in the early eighties.

The two Lisas, the "two New York women" *Le Monde* refers to, spent their childhoods in New Jersey, and, far from being just currently settled in Paris, see themselves as settled Parisians. They have been leading the fight against the love locks for almost a year. They run a Web site called *Nolovelocks.com* (it's called that in French, too) and started a petition that has collected ten thousand signatures. By the strangest of chances, they knew each other as

teen-agers thirty years ago, in New Jersey.

"We met doing a play," Lisa Anselmo explains. "We're both sort of theatre ..."

"Theatre junkies," Lisa Taylor-Huff adds.

"Theatre *gals*. We met doing a play in New Jersey. I think I was still in high school."

"Yeah, I was twenty and you were about sixteen." They both laugh.

They then lost touch, until they rediscovered each other, ten years ago, first as lovers of Paris, then as newly minted residents. Lisa Anselmo is more stylish, and has the glossy mane of every other woman one sees eating lunch on the ninth floor at Barney's. Lisa Taylor-Huff is more mature-seeming—not long after her arrival in Paris, she married a Frenchman, met through a Parisian dating network, and is now a stepmother to his three children. The two women's motives for moving to Paris were, and remain, as mixed and mysterious as such motives always are. They came for the "life style" and the literary possibilities, though both are more narrowly banded than in centuries past—not absinthe and the avant-garde but friends and croissants and blogs and cafés.

It is not entirely a self-sustaining emotion. Like many Americans with dreams of Paris who confront Paris, they have found that they are living in a grouchy, heavily overadministered country, where everyone is socialized to be negative in the first instance, and where the small details of life are made as wrenchingly difficult as possible—though no more for newcomers than they are for the natives, which, of course, helps account for their grouchiness. They wish the French had the same investment in Frenchness that they do. Theirs is actually larger, being chosen, while that of the French is merely passive. "We both are powerhouse gals who have marketing backgrounds," Lisa Anselmo says. "I'm a creative director as well, but what would be more complicated for some people was common nature for us.

"In the beginning, we took a lot of heat," she adds. "It was brutal, the hate mail and the bad language. We would take turns weeping. And they would come at us on our individual blogs and attack us."

"'Oh, Americans always sticking their noses into other people's business,'" the other Lisa says.

"And from Americans, too. 'Americans are always inserting themselves into places they don't belong'—and I'm thinking, Well, isn't that what putting a *lock* there is doing?"

"It took adjusting what we said in interviews to start making it clear that yes, we're Americans, but we live here, we pay taxes, my husband is French."

Practitioners routinely speak of the love locks as a Parisian tradition that goes back five hundred years. In fact, the locks were probably the spawn of a 2006 Italian romance, "I Want You," which presents a scene of locking and shackling and throwing. Despite all the campaigning that the Lisas have done, and the ten thousand signatures on the online petition—despite appearances on LCI, the French CNN, and interviews with *Le Figaro* and *Libération*—the thing goes on: "The Kardashians did it on their show! Basketball wives did it on their show!"

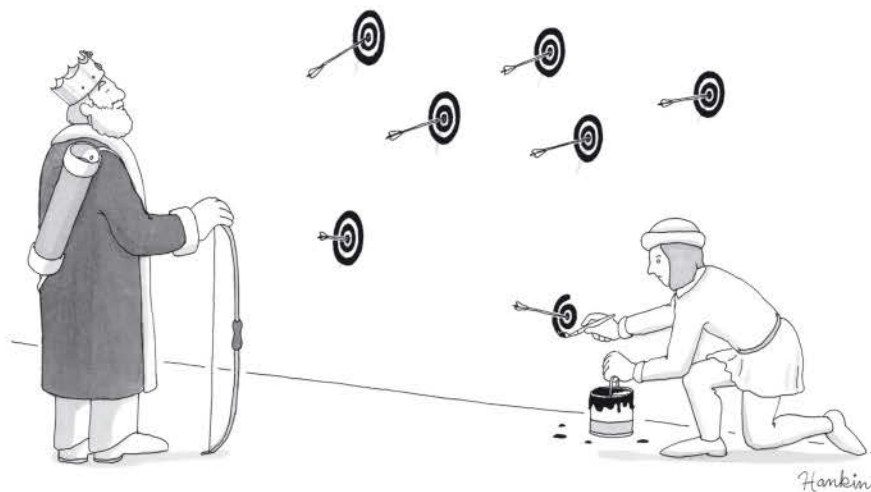
"It's a disease that's infecting the great cities of the world," Lisa Taylor-Huff reflects later, over a glass of Lillet at a café in the courtyard of the Louvre. "Paris is also a museum, but it's still a *living* museum. People live here, we have our lives here, we're educating our kids here, they want to be able to go out in the public spaces. We're raising a bunch, and when I think of my husband's three kids—two of them are in university now and one is still just in middle school—what kind of future are they going to have if all their public spaces and their heritage are

destroyed and degraded because of tourism? Why are we selling out to tourism?"

The two Lisas' vociferousness is produced partly by the perpetual immigrant's need to prove that she is not merely a newcomer but has transferred allegiances even more passionately, along with residence—the same syndrome that, in its darker corners, made the Italian-Corsican Napoleon the most passionate Frenchman alive. If you were born within sight of the Pont des Arts and see it ruined, you merely change your route; there are lots of other bridges to cross.

And then every city with mass tourism makes an implicit compact with tourists, which involves certain territorial concessions. No New Yorker would be really indignant to hear of an insult to the urban fabric at the South Street Seaport. Changing the Guard at Buckingham Palace is a moving and entertaining ritual, and the Tower of London a fascinating historical citadel. No real Londoner would be caught dead near either. Mass tourism doesn't just overcharge its locales; it devours its objects. Our conversion experience to cities inevitably alienates us from the thing that first converted us.

The two Lisas have a partial sense of this irony. If Parisians, or Venetians, tried to distinguish between mere tourists and true travellers and adopted visitors, they would never stop. Better to make two lumps—Them and Us, and stick to the Us places while surrendering the Them spots. Where the people who put up love locks insist that people have always been putting up love locks,



Parisians pretend that the Pont des Arts is the kind of place you would always have wanted to avoid because it attracted the kind of people who put up love locks.

What drives those who oppose the new Samaritaine, even as they mostly ignore the love locks? The absolute authority of the past? Or a distaste for putting a luxury hotel for rich transients in place of an old department store for middle-class Parisians? Alexandre Gady is the president of the chief institutional opponent of the project, the century-old and grandly named Société pour la Protection des Paysages et de l'Esthétique de la France. From the society's magazine—it is filled with decorous views of the French countryside primly bordered by dated typography—one would expect an old French reactionary of a specific predictable sort: gray-suited, silver-haired, with matching metal-rimmed glasses, a decoration in his buttonhole, and a fierce, intelligent suspicion in his eyes of America, the modern and meretricious.

In fact, Gady, only forty-six, is perhaps the preëminent historian of Paris of his generation—with books and articles on the evolution of the Marais and the social life of Place des Victoires, and the top position in architectural history at Paris IV, the old Sorbonne. He is open-collared and good-humored. Like the two Lisas and, indeed, Mme. Antonios, he came to his love for Paris from elsewhere—though his elsewhere was a nearby industrial village.

"Can you believe it?" he says. "I grew up a few kilometres away, and throughout my childhood I never came to Paris. Not once. Oh, exactly once—with my school, on a big bus to see the Louvre museum! My mother hated Paris. She had a phobia about the crowds and the cars. It is bizarre. I resemble a provincial of the nineteenth century who discovered Paris—except that I came not from Toulouse but from a few kilometres away."

Over lunch in a café in the Seventh Arrondissement, he is relaxed and smiling and immediately assents to the notion that Paris risks becoming "Venetian" if it resists new building; he agrees that some of the most success-

ful examples of urbanism in modern Parisian history—the Eiffel Tower and the Beaubourg are two—were seen as discordantly avant-garde when they began. What is it, exactly, that he, and the organization he leads, objects to? First, there is, as he cheerfully admits, something logical and vocational about the protest: basically, a society like his is supposed to oppose projects like this one. If it was his métier to support such projects, he would.

But his real objections involve a complicated argument about the history of Paris. It's an argument that would touch the edge of perversity if it were not so beautifully articulated, at length, as paradox. It is that any energy spent on renovating, improving, or changing inner Paris is merely a diversion from the real needs of the city. It is not just that the wrong side may win the argument. It is the wrong argument to be having.

"That's the heart of the problem," Gady says. "As a historian, I need to have a long-term vision, and the problem with France is that it's a country that loves history but has a very weak historical memory—and its élites, in particular, are mediocre, in the sense that they have no capacity for projection, for seeing what's happened or what's coming. The major problem for Paris is the exhaustion of land. Paris is one of the most ancient capitals in the



world, after Rome. We have a dense history that's very, very old—and, what's more, intimately linked to the construction of the nation-state of France. The Capetians chose Paris as a capital, even though the secret truth is that Paris was never a very good choice for a capital. It's *much* too far north—the Germans got here twice in fifteen days! But in the twelfth century, in the Middle Ages, when Rome was a mediocre village, Paris was already a uni-

versity town and an industrial center. At its height, it had three hundred thousand inhabitants—that's bigger than any city in France today, save five! It was a populated, extremely densely occupied city. Travellers wrote *then* that it was dangerous to cross the streets because of the traffic!

"And here's the central thing—the city has never really grown. Paris is a very tiny surface, and that's the core secret of it. Los Angeles—well, try to walk *that* city on foot. Berlin, too, a city of gigantic blocks. In the nineteenth century, at the moment when Berlin and London and New York acted by annexing the suburbs and smaller cities around them, we turned inward—we concentrated on the Paris of the center. And so Paris—it's beautiful. But it's a doll's house! And that's one reason the Parisian élite is so conservative. They live in the doll's house. They go to the same schools—in the center of Paris. They live in the same apartments—in the center of Paris. The Élysée Palace, the Hôtel Matignon are in the center. So all they see is that. The blindness of the élites is to reproduce a model of returning to the center, always back to the center, and that's a model that can't be maintained."

This, in his view, is the true evil of the Samaritaine project. "Once again, we see the same fundamental error—we'll treat central Paris as a bijou, and let it be surrounded by these dubious zones we call the *banlieues* with people we don't much like. I know what the *banlieues* are—I live in one of them." Gady has built up to his real provocation. It is not that we should be doing this or that—we should not be doing *anything* in central Paris. Not that it is a bad plan in itself, but *any* plan devoted to central Paris is a bad plan, a diversion from the need of the city to grow outward. "La Samaritaine is a choice for the hyper-luxe in a hyper-central neighborhood, decorated with a gesture of architecture." And then, he says, there are the rules: "It's a quartier entirely protected by law—I didn't make it so; the state did—entirely protected, architecturally finished, with no space and strict rules. And if you or I asked to do what L.V.M.H. wants to, we'd be told, 'Sorry, sir, it's forbidden.'" One almost

has the sense that Gady would be content to see La Samaritaine remain shuttered—sooner, at least, than see it become one more glittering gewgaw in the doll's house.

"Paris, central Paris, is a finished city," he says, meaning one not in need of improvement—but also, perhaps, one without a plausible future. A finished city, polished to a gloss, is also a finished city, incapable of new experience. He strongly suspects, in any case, that though he and the preservationists have won the first skirmish they will lose the war. "We'll see what happens, but L.V.M.H. . . ." He trails off.

Asked about the love locks, Gady shakes his head. "They're hideous," he says. "But there the solution is so easy! Just get rid of the metal grilles and replace them with *plaques*"—smooth panels to which no lock can be attached. He shrugs, unaware that the two Lisas have been fighting for this simple solution for a year, to no avail. The love locks, for Gady, seem part of the same density of inner Paris that magnetically draws in tourists as it does politicians; the overloading of the bridge is just a kind of poor man's version of the overloading of the entire area. Inner Paris has been polished to a point of hyper-attractiveness, whether in a luxe form meant to draw oligarchs to the five-star hotels there (after yesterday's five-star hotel in Dubai and before tomorrow's five-star hotel in London) or in the kitsch form exemplified by the groaning weight of tourist relics. Central Paris has become not a window onto the world but a vitrine with exhibits inside, some fine, some squalid, all finished.

As if by some principle of civic equilibrium, while Mme. Antonios waits patiently on the Left Bank for the government to decide whether L.V.M.H. can or cannot have its vast, seven-story glass curtain, the city government stripped away the locks from one section of the bridge and ceded to the two Lisas and their French followers three small test panels of glass, three feet by five feet each, for the Pont des Arts. The three experimental panels make it almost impossible to attach a lock, and each has different qualities of

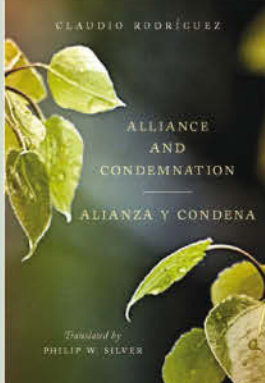
scratch resistance and durability. The new glass *panneaux*, or windows, are there only as a tentative experiment.

"Just seeing those new panels, just to have that view restored, it's hard not to break into tears," Lisa Anselmo says.

"And you can sit on the bench and look at those panels and feel like you can look at the Eiffel Tower and it looks the way it's *supposed to!*" Lisa Taylor-Huff agrees.


All over Paris right now, there are posters for the French singer Véronique Sanson, advertising concerts of songs from what are called, portentously, "Les Années Américaines"—her American years. It is fair to say that no American has any idea that Véronique *had* American years—although she did, and was married to Stephen Stills for a little while. It doesn't matter. The idea of her Americanness appeals to Parisians, as the abstract idea of becoming Parisian appeals to Americans. To become some other thing, you have to not be that thing in the first place, and, if you are that thing, then it is hard for you to really believe that anyone else *can* become it, since the essence of the thing is having been it all along. La Samaritaine, now no longer quite part of Paris, cannot be returned to Paris as a luxury hotel. Two powerhouse New Jersey gals from marketing backgrounds can save the bridge from the love locks—but the French are skeptical that they can restore it to Paris, and the bridge has to be restored to Paris, made part of the Parisian sense of Us, before it can be returned to Paris.

Historians in France like to say that when *lieux de mémoires*, places of memory, are in conflict they become inflamed; the truth is that when sites are in conflict they mostly disappear from view. They get covered over by hoardings, and shame and scaffolding, locked to alien loves. The view through the three tentatively installed glass *panneaux* not only briefly removes the visual noise of the love locks but, in its serenity, restores the innocence of the view, so that everything once again seems simply Parisian, and the people in the boats going by below less like endangered tourists corralled into movable pens and more like pilgrims to the medieval city, seeking its grace. Glass is clear. ♦



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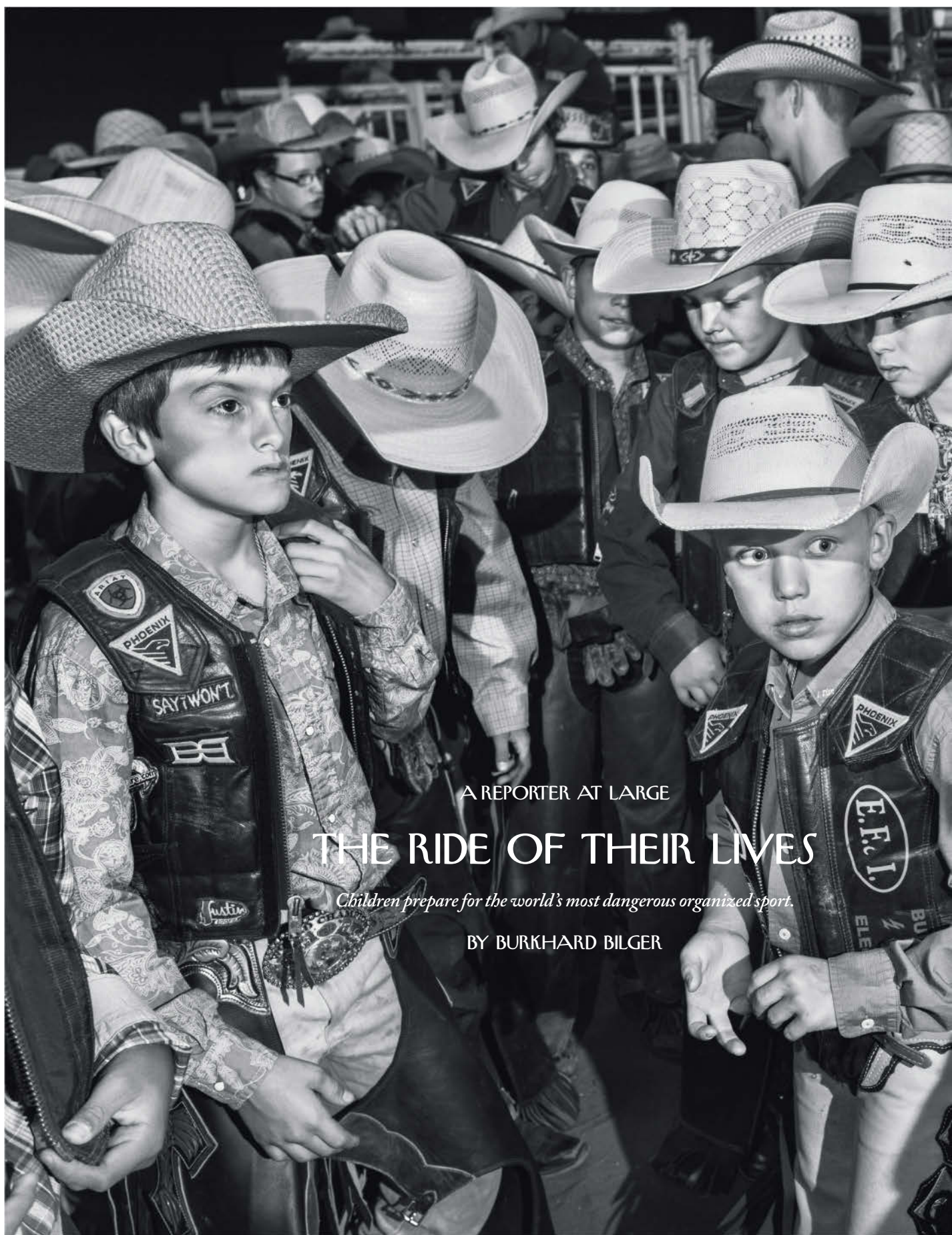
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A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE RIDE OF THEIR LIVES

Children prepare for the world's most dangerous organized sport.

BY BURKHARD BILGER

Calf riders wait in the arena alley on the last day of the Youth Bull Riders World Finals, in Abilene, Texas. Rodeo bull riders learn as

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONNO RATTMAN



children by riding sheep, calves, and steers. Many ride their first bull before their teens.

Rodeo bulls, like the boys who dream of riding them, are unpredictable creatures. They can start out shy and skittish, then suddenly turn ornery. They'll lie down in the chute one day and try to gore you the next. The most dangerous bull ever ridden, by some accounts, began as a scrawny yellow calf in 1988. Half Charolais and half Brahman, he was still long and bony at age three, but liable to turn fat and ungainly if his breeding held true. His owner, Phil Sumner, named him J31—he wasn't sure the bull would live long enough to earn a real name. Sumner took him to a few scrubgrass rodeos in northern Oklahoma, but didn't see much fight in him. "I was thinking, Dude, you're going to have to step up your game plan or you're going to be going to McDonald's," Sumner told me.

Then one Sunday afternoon at a small arena outside of Okeene, Oklahoma, something in the bull snapped. The kid who was riding him got his hand caught in his rope. He was flopping around on J31's back, trying to dismount, when the bull suddenly went crazy beneath him. He leaped up and spun around, bucked forward and kicked back, his legs so high behind him that he almost flipped end over end. By the time the boy pulled free, the bull had nearly gone over the fence. "It just freaked him out," Sumner said.

Animals, as a rule, don't like to have other animals on their backs. They find it strange and distressing—an attack or a violation, an act of dominance. This hasn't kept us from trying to ride them, of course. Horse, mule, donkey, camel, llama, yak, and elephant—the bigger the animal, the more likely we are to climb on top of it. People have sat on ostriches, orcas, alligators, and water buffalo, straddled giant tortoises, and set toddlers on St. Bernards. Their mounts may try to shake them off at first, but the contest is an unequal one, and they tend to knuckle under eventually. Some even learn to like it.

Not rodeo bulls. Their brains aren't wired for submission. They not only refuse to be ridden; they find ever more inventive ways to cast people off. Watching old videos of J31, you can see him learn as he goes. At first, he just charges around the ring and jumps up and down. But the older he gets the crueller and less predictable he becomes. He spins one way, then

the other, charges forward, and jerks to the side. His front and back ends start to uncouple, jackhammering the ground independently. His spine twists and rolls, leaving the rider with no balancing point, no center of gravity. By the age of five, he weighs nearly two thousand pounds and is built like a clenched fist: all hoof and horn and fast-twitch muscle. Sumner eventually sold him to another rancher, Sammy Andrews, figuring that he was too much bull for the local rodeo circuit. It was Andrews who gave him a name to match his reputation: Bodacious.

"He was like a monster once he matured," Tuff Hedeman, a four-time world champion, told me. "Even the good guys were super scared of him. You'd see world champions ride him for a jump or two and then get off." In 1993, at a rodeo in Long Beach, California, Hedeman drew Bodacious for what some consider the greatest ride in history—a near-perfect exhibition of balance and anticipation. Two years later, the bull got his revenge. At the world championships in Las Vegas that August, Hedeman was leading the standings by what proved to be an insurmountable three hundred points when he drew Bodacious again. This time, a split second after leaving the chute, the bull bucked forward with all his might. Hedeman did what riders are supposed to do: he leaned high over the bull's shoulders and flung his arm back as a counterbalance. But just as he came forward, Bodacious threw his head back—smashing it square into Hedeman's face. Hedeman stayed on somehow, his hand twisted in the rope, only to get head-butted again, thrown into the air, and bounced off the bull's back like a rag doll.

The ride broke every bone in Hedeman's face below the eyes. It took thirteen and a half hours of reconstructive surgery and five titanium plates to repair the damage, and Hedeman's sense of smell and taste never returned. "I told my buddy afterward, I must have broke my jaw, because when I bite down my teeth don't come together," he recalled. "People were looking at me and then turning their eyes away or putting their hands over their faces. I thought, I must look like Frankenstein or something."

Seven weeks later, when a rider named Scott Breeding drew Bodacious at the National Finals Rodeo, he elected to wear a hockey mask for protection. It

didn't help. In less than four seconds, the bull had knocked Breeding off with the same move, fracturing his left eye socket. The next day, Sammy Andrews retired Bodacious from competition. "I didn't want to be the guy who let him kill someone," he told me.

The boys at the Camp of Champions couldn't wait to get on a bull like that. How else would they be world champions one day? Bull riding is a collaborative sport—a pairs competition in which one partner tries to kill the other, like an ice dance with an axe murderer. If a rider manages to hang on for eight seconds, he'll earn up to fifty points for his own form and fifty for the bull's. The meaner the animal the better the score. "Ooh, I really want to ride 44!" Wacey Schalla told his friends Trigger Hargrove and Jet Erickson one morning. He jumped up and down on the catwalk along the arena, and pointed at a bony brown calf in the chute below. "I hear that sucker's rank!"

Wacey, Trigger, and Jet were eight years old. The tops of their heads barely cleared my waist, yet they already had the rangy look of seasoned riders. They wore saddleman jeans and paisley Western shirts, tooled leather boots and straw cowboy hats, oversized to fend off the broiling June sun. Wacey was the smallest of the three and the most intensely focussed. His eyes would turn to slits above his freckled cheeks as he visualized his next ride. Trigger was taller and leaner, with a natural swagger—he was an excellent roper as well as rider. Jet was the shyest and the most delicately built. While Trigger kept up a running monologue—"That 36 nearly yanked my arm off! But then the next one didn't hardly buck at all"—Jet slumped against the rails, adrift in his own thoughts. "He's kind of a floater," his father, Everett, told me. "But when he scoots up on that calf and it takes off, his body takes over and he just *rides*." He laughed. "It kind of reminds you of the legends of the past, watching them kids."

Almost every weekend, the three boys would ride against one another at some small-town rodeo in Oklahoma. The previous Saturday, it had been Elk City, with Wacey coming in first, Trigger second, and Jet third. But the order could easily have been shuffled. "It's just back

and forth with those three," Trigger's grandfather, Eddie, told me. "They're the fiercest competitors and the best of friends." All three were the sons of professional rodeo riders. They'd gone from bouncing around on sheep at the age of three or four—"mutton busting," it was called—to riding calves at six and now the occasional steer. In two or three years, they'd get on their first bulls. Their winnings came mostly in the form of engraved belt buckles and prize saddles—"I've got a bunch more in my closet somewhere," Wacey told me, when he showed me a few buckles at his house—as well as small cash purses. But they'd grow more substantial soon enough. Caden Bunch, one of the eleven-year-olds at the camp, had made more than a hundred thousand dollars.

The Camp of Champions was a final tuneup for the biggest rodeo of their lives: the Youth Bull Riders World Finals. The event would draw the top fifty riders from six age groups to Abilene, Texas, in July. It would feature rougher stock than most of them were used to riding, so they wanted all the help they could get. The camp, founded by a bull rider turned cowboy preacher named Andy Taylor, was a combination rodeo school and revival meeting. The first half of the week had been devoted to girls' events—barrel racing, goat tying, and breakaway roping—and the second half to boys' events: calf roping, bull riding, and bronco busting. The camp was held on the grounds of the Trinity Fellowship, a budding megachurch in Sayre, Oklahoma, on the short-grass prairie just east of the Texas Panhandle. There were livestock pens and dusty red arenas to one side and a striped tent to the other, where the campers met for church services every morning and evening. "You know what's cool, boys?" Ted Nuce, one of the trainers and a former world-champion bull rider, told them. "Riding bulls is a Jesus trap. You guys are going to pray because you want to. You need some protection out there."

Earlier that day, the boys had been to the first of the morning services. These had a comforting sameness to them. The house band, led by a local bulldozer operator and his sons, would play some Southern-flavored Christian rock. Andy Taylor would draw a few lines of Scripture, then some retired bull riders would

come up to testify. These were small, wiry, tightly wound men—"the bantam roosters of the rodeo world," one calf roper called them—accustomed to keeping their pain to themselves. They'd talk, haltingly, about the injuries that had laid them low at the height of their careers, and how little they knew about earning a living in the real world. How they'd succumbed to drink and drugs, disloyalty and meanness before the Lord pulled them through. "Some of my family members just abandoned me," a young, bespectacled bull rider named Matt Austin confessed. "I was broken. But I'm here to tell you that God will never leave you."

I couldn't tell how deeply this registered with the eight-year-olds. Riding calves is less life-threatening than riding bulls, and Wacey and his friends seemed to think they were immortal anyhow. They were by turns the best-behaved boys I'd ever met—they addressed adults as sir and Ma'am, took off their hats in church, and lowered their eyes and mumbled "Excuse me" when they bumped into you—and the rowdiest, the least domesticated. "They make me proud," their counsellor, Keith Hutton, told me on my first night at camp. He was about to say more when a chorus of screams and shouts erupted from the bunkhouse below, in the church basement. "He's bleeding!" a high voice was squealing. "There's blood everywhere!" Hutton sighed and blew out his cheeks. He waited a moment for the noise to subside, then lurched up from the couch and trudged downstairs.

Reports on the incident would remain muddled and contradictory. As far as Hutton could tell, Wacey was jumped by another boy after beating him in a game of H-O-R-S-E. Trigger waded in to defend him, and in the ensuing fracas the assailant fell and smacked his head, opening up a gash. "It was kind of a freaky deal," Hutton told me the next morning. "It looked like his head had fallen off, there was so much blood." By then, in any case, the boys were all friends again, monkeying around in the breakfast line while Trigger practiced his roping tricks. A little blood, they knew, came with the territory. Trigger's uncle had torn off a thumb roping steers, and Jet's father had snapped the C1 vertebra in his neck when a bull named Stoney tossed him on his head. He spent the next six months

immobilized in a halo, not sure if he could ever get on a bull again. "We know it's dangerous," he told me. "But there's more glory in it than injuries, I'll promise you that. And the pain always goes away. Sometimes you just have to wait longer than others."

When breakfast was over, Hutton corralled the boys into a little trailer hitched to a golf cart and hauled them over to the arena. (He was legally blind, so he couldn't drive a van.) "The Calf-Rider Express is pullin' out!" he shouted, then turned and fixed them with a baleful glare. "Hey! I don't need to hear a bunch of yellin'! We had enough of that foolishness last night. And don't go jumpin' off the trailer! That freaks me out." Bald and gap-toothed, with bright, bewildered eyes, Hutton grew up an Army brat in England. He got deported for selling black-market cigarettes, and spent the next few decades smoking weed and paying rent, as he put it, until he found Jesus. "This hot blonde was on me to come to church," he said. "I thought she might give me a little, but I ended up crying out thirty years of being pissed. I've been clean ever since." When he wasn't volunteering at the church, Hutton worked as a roofer, a substitute teacher, and a drug counsellor. It sometimes seemed like he'd treated someone in almost every family in his town.

Western Oklahoma is a tough place to live in the best of times. The soil is poor and full of gypsum and clay. The winds can rise to catastrophe out of a clear blue sky. In the right light, there's a kind of grandeur to its vast, featureless sweep, where every truck stop and water tower can take on totemic power. But any sense of self-importance has long since been wrung from the local population. People age quickly here. The young men with hips cocked and thumbs hooked through belt loops turn into swaybacked old ranchers soon enough, beer guts tucked into embroidered shirts. The girls in ponytails and rhinestones weather into creased, careworn women. They know that the eyes of the world are focussed elsewhere—

on Texas, perhaps—and do their best to get on with it.

Early that morning, a towering thunderhead had rumbled in from the east, stripping branches from the cottonwoods and flooding the streets of Oklahoma City. But the sky blew clear within minutes, leaving only muddy ruts behind. "They're saying that this is going to be the next Mojave Desert if we don't have a weather change," Hutton said. "It's been going on for ten or twelve years now." The fracking industry had brought new jobs to the area—Elk City was growing fast—but without water the boom might not last long. And what with the low minimum wage and the high teen-pregnancy rate, methamphetamines and prescription-drug addiction, life



was lived ever closer to the bone. Around here, the notion of childhood as a safe, protected place—a benign bubble—seemed like poor training for life. Religion and rodeo made more sense.

When the eight-year-olds had arrived at the arena and put on their helmets and protective vests, one of the trainers gathered them around him in a circle. "We don't do this for the money," he told them. "We do this because the very first time we got on a bull—the first time we got bucked off and hit the ground and got up—right there we knew that this is what we were meant to be doing." He cast his eyes around the circle, peering hard at each one of them. "God has a plan for you being here," he said. "What you learn in bull riding you're going to be able to apply to everyday life. When life gives you a storm, you can sit back and let it toss you wherever it wants to toss you, or you can have the confidence to know that God created you to be a winner, and to have honor and glory."

The boys didn't need convincing. A bucking calf seemed like the ultimate amusement-park ride to them—a bumper car and extreme coaster rolled into one. When they weren't in line for another ride, they were practicing their moves on the Mighty Bucky: a padded barrel perched on a steel pivot and springs. I never saw a serious injury among the eight-year-olds, but plenty of

boys were bawling by the time they picked themselves up off the ground. Yet they couldn't wait for the next round. The teen-agers, if anything, were even more eager. Nearly every ride left one of them hobbling to the gate, clutching an arm or leg. I saw one boy's cheek split open by a bull's horn and another boy dragged across the ground like tin cans behind a bumper, then stomped on for good measure. Both were back on another bull the same day.

I thought about a playground near my house in Brooklyn, in Park Slope. A couple of years ago, it was beautifully renovated by the city, with a rock-lined stream meandering through it and an old-fashioned pump that children could crank to set the water flowing. The stream was the delight of the neighborhood for a while, thronged with kids splashing through the shallows and floating sticks down the current. Yet some parents were appalled. The rocks were a menace, they declared. The edges were too sharp, the surfaces too slippery. A child could fall and crack her skull. "I actually kept tapping them to check if they were really rocks," one commenter wrote on the Park Slope Parents Web site. "It seemed odd to me to have big rocks in a playground." Within two weeks, a stonemason had been brought in to grind the edges down. The protests continued. One mother called a personal-injury lawyer about forcing the city to remove the rocks. Another suggested that something be done to "soften" them. "I am actually dreading the summer because of those rocks," still another complained.

The parents at the camp flipped this attitude on its head. They valued courage over caution, grit over sensitivity. They revelled in the raw physicality of boys. The mothers sat in the bleachers taking videos and hollering advice—"Wyatt, just ride the way Daddy taught you!" The fathers straddled the chute, leaning over their sons to cinch the rope and shove the calf into position: "Are you ready?" "Yes, sir!" "You've got to take the fight to him." "Yes, sir!" "You've got to want it." When the gate blew open, they leaped up on the rail and watched their sons with clenched fists and narrowed eyes. They weren't stage parents, for the most part. They just took following your bliss to its logical ex-

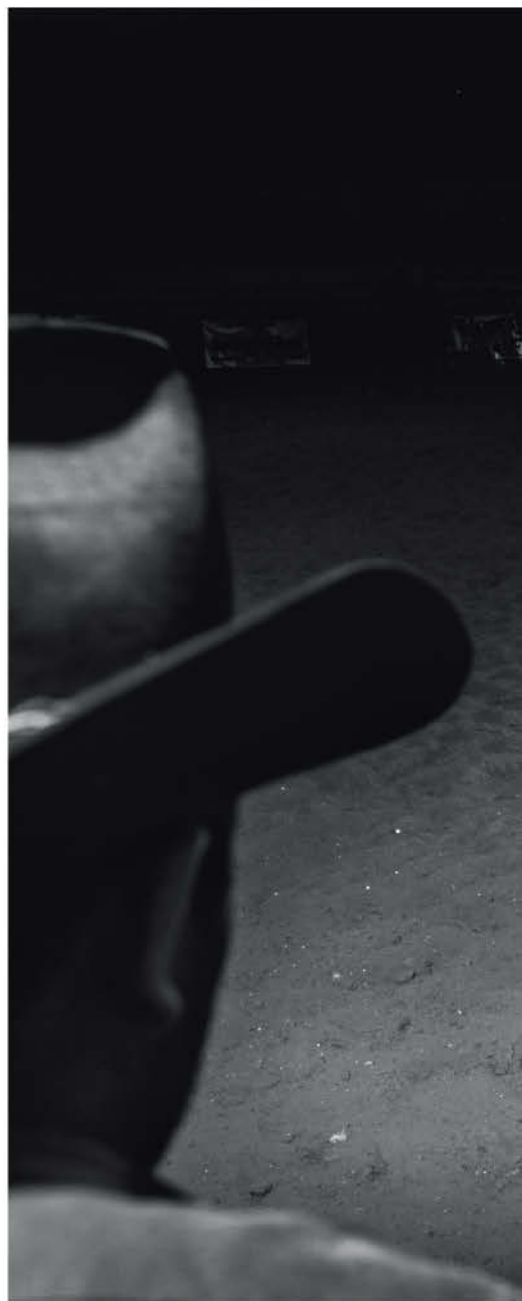
treme. "I'd let my kid do whatever he has a passion for," one mother told me, "even if he wanted to be a piano player."

How dangerous is bull riding? The best numbers come from a sports epidemiologist named Dale Butterwick. In 2006, when he was at the University of Calgary, Butterwick set up a registry of rodeo injuries and spent three years filling it with data from rodeo medics and riders' self-reports. Between 1989 and 2009, he found, twenty-one contestants had died in the United States and Canada. Sixteen were bull riders, including one twelve-year-old boy. Another twenty-eight sustained "life-changing" injuries.

Butterwick's study didn't track the riders' less grievous accidents—the breaks, tears, gashes, dislocations, concussions, and contusions that can occur on almost any ride. But, according to a twenty-five-year study that used data from the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, injuries tend to cluster in four areas: the head and face (sixteen per cent), the neck and back (fifteen per cent), the knees (twelve per cent), and the shoulders (twelve per cent). "It's not *if* you're gonna get hurt; it's when," some of the parents at the camp acknowledged. Others downplayed the risk, saying they'd rather have one bull try to kill them than eleven football players. Yet bull riders are ten times more likely than football players to be seriously injured. Theirs is the most dangerous organized sport in the world.

Butterwick's data ended with an alarming spike: in the last two years of the study, the rate of catastrophic injury was more than double that of the twenty-year average. This came as no surprise to Cody Custer, the senior trainer at the camp. "The quality of the stock just keeps getting better," he told me. "When we were riding, you might go to ten rodeos and maybe get one bull that bucked really hard. Now, out of a herd of thirty, twenty-two will be buckers. It's an epidemic, really."

Custer's son Brett was a sixteen-year-old bull rider at the camp. He was a little stud, Custer said. "But all it takes is one time to break an egg in there—or kill a kid or paralyze him." The Camp of Champions played it safe by rodeo standards. The boys had to wear helmets and vests, the trainers stressed caution, the livestock were somewhat less than homicidal. But at the Youth World Finals all



In the past two decades, selective breeding has made

bets would be off: the previous year, among the oldest contestants, three out of four had been bucked off.

When Custer was born, in 1965, rodeo still seemed an extension of ordinary cowboying. He joined his first roundup at the age of four, on his family's ranch south of the Grand Canyon, and spent much of his youth riding bareback. He learned to loosen his hips and shift his weight, to roll with every pitch and yaw. He learned to ride with his feet, clamping them tight to an animal's sides and reacting to the slightest twitch. He learned to use every inch and ounce of his lariat-thin frame, sitting tall to increase his leverage and



rodeo bulls more dangerous and valuable than ever before. The best ones cost half a million dollars and their semen can fetch thousands.

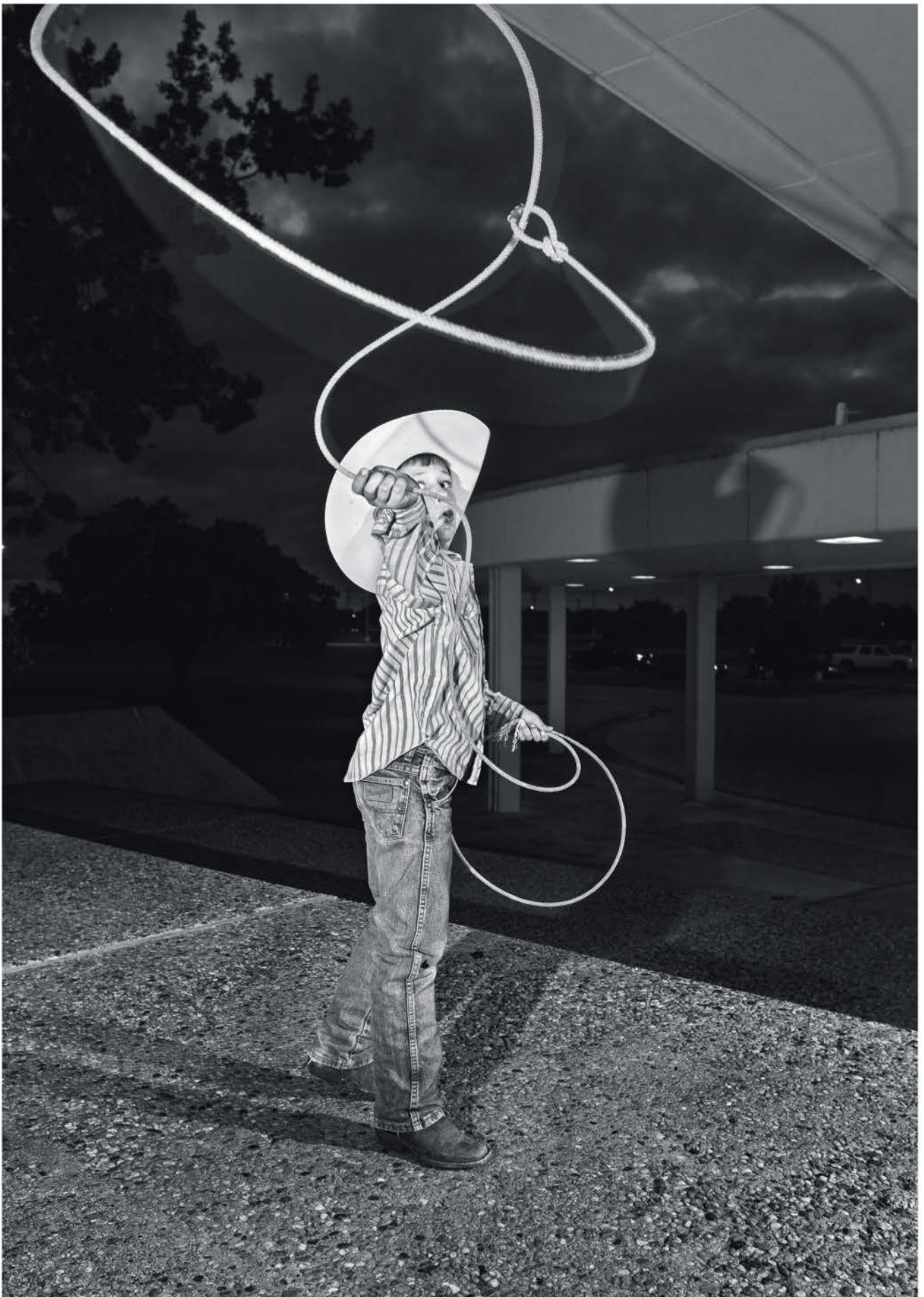
send pressure down his legs. By the age of fourteen, he'd ridden some twenty-five hundred steer. These were castrated animals, not nearly as strong and wild as an uncut bull, which was just what he needed. "Most of them just went straight up and down," he told me. "But my confidence got sky high and so did my skills."

In his twenty years on the circuit, Custer had his share of injuries: a collapsed lung, several broken ribs, and a broken jaw that had to be wired shut for five weeks. He had major surgeries on both shoulders and one of his knees and suffered a string of severe concussions, the worst of which knocked him out for

more than half an hour. Yet he counts himself lucky. Custer won a world championship in 1992, was elected to the Professional Bull Riders Ring of Honor in 2003, and was still walking when he retired, that same year. "I got away pretty good, all things considered," he told me. "You probably won't be hearing about twenty-year bull-riding careers anymore."

Bodacious changed the way rodeo animals are bred. Before him, most bulls were a dubious commodity—worth more for beef than for bucking cowboys. A rancher might get a hundred dollars

every time his bull was ridden, twice that much at big events. The riders made the real money—they were the ones that people came to see. Bodacious changed that equation. People who'd never heard of Tuff Hedeman knew the name of the bull who'd "rearranged his face," as Hedeman's wife later put it. After Bodacious was retired, he toured the country like a war hero, appearing in *GQ* and *Penthouse*, making personal appearances at restaurants, casinos, and car dealerships. "It was unreal," Sammy Andrews told me. "I thought we'd sell two or three T-shirts. But we had tour buses coming around to see him." There were Bodacious coffee



Rodeo camp features calf roping and bronco busting for boys; for girls, there's barrel racing, goat tying, and breakaway roping.

mugs, belt buckles, jewelry lines, and condoms. "If a Brahman bull ever were a superstar, then Bodacious just might be," the band Primus sang. "He's a cream-colored, beefy-brawn, full-fledged, four-footed bovine celebrity."

It wasn't long before breeders found that they didn't really need riders to make money. As Bodacious's brand of notoriety spread to other bulls—Wolfman, Dillinger, Asteroid, Bushwacker—ranchers began to earn more from selling sperm, swag, and licensing agreements than they did from rodeos. At events called futurities, the bulls could now compete directly against one another, carrying dummy cowboys on their backs while judges rated their bucking ability. The top bull could earn a quarter of a million dollars at a single event, and as the purses grew so did the sport's attention to genetics. Ranchers once content to breed any bull that leaped around now turned to outcrossing and in-vitro fertilization to select specific behaviors: the dropkick, the side spin, the twisting belly roll. The result was a succession of ever more powerful, more athletic, more murderous bulls. The only question was who could ride them.

When Custer won his world championship, in 1992, he rode more than three-quarters of the bulls he drew. Last year's world champion rode just half. The change has been especially hard on young riders. Their learning curve gets steeper every year, and there are fewer and fewer ordinary animals for them to practice on. "These kids that are eleven, twelve, thirteen years old—they're getting on bulls that we never saw until we were pros," Custer told me. "It's like a phenomenal little football player being put in with a bunch of college kids who want to knock his head off."

Custer is a hard man to rile up. The dashing young cowboy from the old videos now wears tinted glasses and button-down shirts and ends every conversation with "God bless." But when he talks about rodeo politics you can see the old bull rider in him. Four years ago, when his son was still in junior high, Custer sent a letter to the National High School Rodeo Association asking for steers to be used rather than bulls for the smaller contestants. A number of retired rodeo stars co-signed the proposal, but the request was ignored. "The guys who

are raising the bulls, most of them have dollar signs in their eyes," Custer told me. "Their interest is not in that little boy. Their interest is in the bull."

A couple of weeks before the Youth World Finals, I went to visit Dillon Page, the co-owner of D&H Cattle Company, in south-central Oklahoma. Page's family has been raising livestock in the bottomland along the Washita River for three generations. When he bought his first set of bucking bulls, thirty years ago, there were a few dozen rodeo stock contractors in the country. Now there are close to a thousand. For the past few years, Page has managed the ranch with his son Hoyt Dillon, at one point winning the Professional Bull Riders Stock Contractor of the Year award for six years running. H.D., as his son is known, runs the breeding operation and shuttles the bulls to rodeos, while Dillon directs the day-to-day workings of the ranch. On the morning I visited, he'd been up since seven, haying the fields.

"We've got some bulls acting like queers back there," he told me as we walked toward his truck to begin the morning feeding. "Seems to happen every time you get a weather change. A couple of bulls start ridin' each other, then they go to fightin', and it just turns into a blasted mess. That's how you end up with a lot of your cripples." Page, who is sixty-three, has the crouched, sinewy build and the flinty manner of an old deputy sheriff in a Western. He holds the small of his back as he walks and rubs his neck, which is deeply creased and baked red by the sun. As he muttered instructions to the cowboys on his property, a gold tooth flashed from time to time in his upper jaw.

Some five hundred bulls were scattered across the ranch's fifteen hundred acres. Tawny, black, mottled, white—rodeo bulls are almost always mutts—they grazed under spreading pecans, in thirteen pastures separated by tall steel fences. The best of them could go for half a million dollars in their prime, but the ranch made even more by selling half-interests in calves. An investor might pay twenty-five thousand for a yearling, cover all its expenses and entry fees, then split the winnings with Page and his son. If all went well, the bull would get sent to thirty-five or forty rodeos a year, earning

five to ten thousand in fees and up to a hundred thousand in futurities and other winnings. After eight or nine years, he'd be retired, then used to sire calves for another decade or more. A single straw of champion semen could go for upward of five thousand dollars.

When we reached the first pasture, Page jumped out of the truck to open the gate and drove over to a row of galvanized troughs. He put the truck in neutral to set it rolling slowly beside them and flipped a toggle beneath the steering wheel. This triggered an auger in back to release the feed—a mixture of cracked corn, cottonseed, soybean hulls, and dried distiller's grain. As it poured down the length of the troughs, Page jumped out of the cab again and ran back to pull some hay from the truck bed. He scattered it around the troughs, ran back to the cab, climbed in, and drove to the next gate, then started the process all over. At one point, a big white bull came shouldering toward him, testicles hanging nearly to the ground. Page shouted and waved his arms. When that didn't work, he bent down and picked up a dirt clod and pelted him with it. The bull stood his ground and gave a deep grunt, then shook his horns and clattered off. "You just hope they don't decide to run over you," Page said when he got back in.

Before he bred bulls, Page tried his hand at riding them for a few years. He was never good enough to make a career of it, he told me, but he got off easy where injuries were concerned—just a few broken bones and a ruptured spleen. Although there was that one ride, when he was seventeen or eighteen—the one that left him with three ribs broken off into his lower belly. "I was pissin' and shittin' blood for four days," he said. "I don't know if it was my bladder or my kidneys, but something wasn't right in there." The pain got so bad that he had a friend haul him to the emergency room in Ardmore. But the doctors kept him waiting for four or five hours, so he went back home. Two weeks later, the bleeding finally stopped. "I guess it wasn't life-threatening," he said.

I asked him how he would have fared on bulls like the ones he breeds now, and he laughed. "Oh, not very well, I guess. I rode some pretty good ones in my day—one of 'em, J's Pet, hadn't been rode in

five years. I thought I'd done a pretty good deal. But he couldn't even hold a light to some of these things that we buck today."

Bucking bulls are like human athletes: Every generation has a few that are unaccountably great. The Peyton Mannings and LeBron Jameses can't really be reproduced or used to gauge the average level of play. It's when you look down the bench that you start to see a pattern. "Take Stone Sober over there," Page said. He pointed to a red bull pacing inside a trailer next to the pasture, soon to be taken to a rodeo. He was built like a middleweight wrestler, with bunched shoulders and thick veins ridging his muscles. "We'd rather have him a little bigger," he said. "He's probably thirteen hundred, fourteen hundred pounds—his mama was little bitty. But he can jump as high as this fence with somebody on it. He can turn back and spin and go the other way, and he has a lot of kick and a great big belly roll. Shucks, there ain't no telling what he's gonna do. I don't think he knows hisself." In the past three years, Stone Sober had bucked off twenty-two out of twenty-three riders, most of them in under four seconds.

An animal like that is a freak of nature, Page said. It's a petri dish full of exotic mutations—of tics and phobias, spastic nerves and explosive rages, carefully culled and combined. The sperm from a champion sire is usually collected off-site, mixed with eggs from a proven dam, and transplanted into a rancher's cows. It doesn't always work. Genetic recombination is a crapshoot, and the outcome depends as much on psychology as on physiology. "Confidence plays a big part in it," H. D. Page told me later, on the phone. "If a bull gets rode every time he pokes his head out the gate, he'll either quit buckin' or change his buckin' pattern to win. Some of them just figure it's not worth the effort, and some of them learn to enjoy their jobs. They get addicted to the adrenaline."

The result can be as unhealthy for the bull as for the rider. When a two-thousand-pound animal leaps six feet in the air and hammers down on his back legs, things can go wrong: joints pop, tendons snap, backs get thrown out of kilter. One of the pastures on the Pages' ranch was full of hobbled old gladiators,

kept around for semen or sentiment. "This one here broke his leg at the finals," Page said, pulling up next to a white-headed bull with a black eye patch. "Hard Twisted. Won a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars as a two-year-old, but you can't set a broke leg. See how crooked it is?" He let the truck idle a little farther, then pointed to a big brown bull stepping gingerly beside the fence. "His leg? He broke it so bad that it drew up. It don't even touch the ground." He shook his head. "I shoulda done killed him. They make the best hamburger meat there is—well muscled and lean. Ain't nobody that'll have better hamburger meat. But sometimes you get to thinkin' too much and you keep 'em around when you shouldn't."

I asked Page if he ever wonders if things have gone too far. His son tried to ride Bodacious three times, yet here they are trying to make bulls even meaner. Is there a limit to how dangerous a bull can or should be? "I hope not," he said. "Because I intend on making one that's a whole lot ranker than we've had before." He smirked. "You know the bad thing? We can't breed cowboys. If you could figure out how to get a set of women and three or four sires that had all that heart and the other ingredients that it takes, then you could match the sires and the dams up like we do the bulls. Then maybe we'd have a great bull rider."

In the meantime, there's only one alternative: start them young.

The Taylor County Expo Center, in Abilene, must have looked like the Taj Mahal to Wacey and his friends. They'd been to a lot of rodeos by then—dusty little arenas at the edge of town, with a rickety concession stand on one side and some bleachers on the other—but never one like this. The parking lot was as big as an airport, with what looked like a giant spaceship in the middle. It had a hallway inside that went clear around it, filled with folks selling cowboy hats and rifle cases, saddle soap, tooth guards, rope rosin, and T-shirts that said things like "Mama Tried" and "The Hurrier I Go, the Behinder I Get." When you walked down the tunnel and out into the arena, the seats went up and up on every side. The roof looked like it was five stories high.



Wacey Schalla (left) and Jet Erickson practice on

The floor was covered in a maze of pens and chutes full of livestock, with cowboys hanging off all the rails. There was even air-conditioning—at a rodeo! Imagine that.

The World Finals are really six separate competitions, each for a different age group and animal. The four-to-six-year-olds ride sheep, the seven- and eight-year-olds are on calves, the nine-to-eleven-year-olds on steers, and the rest on increasingly fearsome bulls. Each contestant rides once a day for three days, earning up to a hundred points per ride from the four judges stationed around the arena. On the fourth day,



an oil-barrel bull. With fewer and fewer ordinary animals to practice on, the learning curve gets steeper every year.

the top fifteen scorers out of the fifty in each group compete for their division championship. There are cash prizes for the highest scores every day and a big pot at the end for each champion—more than sixty thousand dollars altogether.

“A lot of this event is about the luck of the draw,” Curtis Spain, one of the event’s organizers, told me. The best buckers earn the best scores for their riders, but they’re also the most likely to toss a rider off. “We call that thinning the herd.” Back home in Forney, Texas, Spain had his own rodeo arena as well as a mechanical bull. His son Mason

was one of the top eleven-year-olds in the finals, and his daughter Shayne, age seven, was an excellent mutton buster—one of only two girls in the finals. Girls could qualify for the older age groups as well, but most dropped out before that—often at their parents’ urging. “The world’s most dangerous sport is not something you really want to let your little girl do,” her father told me. “This is Shayne’s farewell tour.”

The first round was rough on Spain’s kids, as it was on the boys from Oklahoma. All of them rode well but drew sluggish animals, earning mediocre scores. Trigger was the exception. He

drew one of the feistiest calves in the pen—a big black Holstein—but got bucked off right before the buzzer. “He came out and took two big blows and then started lopin’,” Trigger told me the next morning. “The second blow put me over on the side, and it’s really hard to stay on when he’s lopin’ and bouncin’ like that.” I told him that I was sure he’d do better this time, but he didn’t look convinced. “Hopefully,” he said, picking at his chaps.

“The Star-Spangled Banner” was blaring over the loudspeakers by then—a taped version by LeAnn Rimes, sounding like a country girl who’d just walked

out on her worthless lover. Over by the chutes, the mutton busters were getting ready to start the second round. Shayne Spain leaned against a rail and glanced up at Jadeyn Lara, the only other girl in the finals. Shayne was a year older and half a head taller, with a gap in her front teeth. Her stringy blond hair fell loose across her shirt—her brother’s, which she’d worn for good luck. Jadeyn had on a pink vest that said “Ridin’ Dirty” and pink chaps stitched with dollar signs—her nickname was J. Money. She’d positioned herself at the highest point in the arena, on a platform above the center chute, and was kneeling there with her head lifted high, like the figurehead on a ship’s prow. She and Shayne had both dominated their local rodeo circuits—Shayne in north-central Texas and Jadeyn in the southeast—and both wanted badly to be the first girl to win the finals. “The boys hate it,” Curtis Spain told me. “They hate losing to a girl. But little girls develop faster than little boys, and Shayne is fearless, man. She likes rubbing their noses in it.”

Sheep aren’t all that into bucking. Truth be told, they don’t like to run that much, either. It takes a sharp spur and a clanging cowbell to get most of them moving, and even then they’re a pretty smooth, well-cushioned ride. Still, the mutton busters found ways to fall off. Some lost their grip on the wool and keeled over sideways. Others held on tight and pulled their mounts down on top of them. One or two hit the arena wall and got peeled off, or flipped head over heels when their sheep came to a dead stop. Shayne and Jadeyn both managed to hang on, but Shayne got the better draw. Her sheep had been sheared recently, so it was harder to hold but also faster and jumpier. She scored a sixty-four, for fifth place over all. Jadeyn started off well, or at least upright, then slowly began to tip over. By the time the buzzer sounded, she was hanging off her sheep at three o’clock, yet she never fell: fifty-four points—enough for eighteenth place.

By the time the calf riders’ turn came, the crowd was getting giddy. “Sweet Child O’ Mine” was playing on the P.A., with a ragged chorus of bleats and bellows behind it. As the contestants lined up, the m.c. introduced each one with a verbal drumroll: age, home



Jadeyn Lara (left) and Shayne Spain after completing the third round of mutton busting. Spain

town, championships, and sponsors. Tiger Mart, B&B Towing, Pop’s Honey Fried Chicken. A lot of the boys already had stage names: Dusty Rhodes, Colt Christie, Fate Snyder, Tater Tot Wilcox. Their parents knew that rodeo is one part extreme sport, one part show business. Some of the riders looked as gaudy as rodeo clowns in their em-

broidered shirts and lizard-skin boots, crested Roman helmets, and vests that read “Cowkids for Christ.” But it was up to the calves to make them look good.

Wacey drew a big white Holstein with mean-looking eye patches. The calf looked promising at first, but proved to be a halfhearted buck. It was all Wacey



finished third over all; Lara finished eighth. They have become friends through competing together.

could do to score sixty points, leaving him in thirteenth place—just enough to make the championship round, if he rode well the next day. Jet drew one of the rankest calves in Abilene: a twisting, half-spinning specimen who'd bucked off his rider the day before. For a second or two, Jet looked loose and in control. Then he leaned a touch too far forward,

the calf changed directions and kicked up its back legs, and just like that the boy was tumbling through the air. A few minutes later, Trigger met the same fate. He came out looking stiff and off center, got thrown to one side, and bounced off just before the buzzer. Both boys got up crying but dried their tears by the time they reached the gate. They

would not qualify for the final round.

"He hit the ground trying," Jet's father told me afterward. "That calf would dang sure have been hard for any kid to ride." Trigger's dad was less philosophical. "He's in a slump," he said. "First time I've seen it in his life. It's just really frustrating—he's got so much natural talent. When he's locked in, he

can't be beat, but he's been riding like an average kid. Those first two calves, he could ride those with his eyes closed."

The next morning, before the national anthem, one of the event directors made his way to the microphone. A tall, barrel-chested Texan named Danny Malone, he worked as a lineman northwest of Fort Worth and had a sixteen-year-old boy in the Open Bull competition. It had been brought to his attention, he announced, that some parents had been acting inappropriately—using foul language and “whuppin’ on” boys who’d been bucked off. “Well, I’m here to tell you that that will not be tolerated,” he said. “It’s the reason we have U.S. Marshals and Texas Rangers here. If you are caught, you will be asked to leave this property and you will not be allowed back.” He paused, then added, almost beseechingly, “Guys, come on! They’re young and they’re trying their best. If they’re not—hey, we don’t know what’s going on in their heads. Maybe they’re just having an off day. Now, I know I’m not their parent. I can’t tell you what to do with your kids in private. But if I see you whuppin’ on them I will not tolerate it. And, yes, I know who you are.”

Most parents at the World Finals weren’t used to seeing their kids bucked off, much less three out of four times. At one point, I watched one of the fourteen-year-olds leave the arena after getting thrown off his second bull. He sat down, took off his helmet, and smashed it into his forehead. Then he did it again, methodically, five times in a row. “That’s gotta hurt,” someone next to me said. It was the first time I’d heard that at a rodeo. When I asked Malone for a rundown of the week’s injuries, he mentioned “the usual bumps and bruises”—rodeo-speak for everything from deep lacerations to hobbling hematomas. Then he went on to list a dislocated hip, a fractured eye socket, and a stock contractor whose incisors had been knocked in by a swinging gate. “We had to put his teeth in saline and send him to the trauma center,” Malone said.

Malone’s son Austen was one of the best riders in Abilene, as well as one of the most injury-prone. A lanky, sweet-faced kid with long curly blond hair, he’d had several concussions, broken arms, and a dislocated neck. He’d shattered his

right leg so badly that the tibia and the fibula were snapped off completely, the foot turned around backward. The previous year, Austen had spent a week in the hospital after a bull jumped on his chest. Yet he’d come back to win the World Finals. “I worry about it. I do,” his father told me. “We discuss it all the time. If something serious happens in the arena and God calls his number—if a fatality happens to my son bull riding—it’ll be a struggle. I’m not going to lie to you. But I’ll know that my son will be at peace. That he died happy and enjoying what he was doing.”

A few minutes later, the mutton busters came out to kick off the third round. Shayne was just seven points out of the lead, but her father didn’t have much faith in the sheep she’d drawn: its last rider had scored only fifty-four points. Shayne’s only hope was to spur it out of its torpor, working its sides with both heels, though she’d have a harder time keeping her balance. “I told her to let fly the leg,” Curtis said. “Just let fly. Get all the points you can.” The tactic worked. The sheep pelted across the arena with sudden vigor, the girl kept her seat, and the ride earned sixty-two points. “You know what they say,” the m.c. shouted. “Sometimes the best cowboy for the job is a cowgirl!” Shayne was now in third place for the championship round. Even better, she’d outscored her rival, Jadeyn, who hadn’t been as lucky in her draw and was stuck back in eighth. “We’re making our way up!” Curtis told me. “We’re like a shark, circling, circling, looking for a chance.”

Wacey was in a tougher spot, twenty-one points out of first. He needed both a great ride and some help from the leaders to win. When I found him on the catwalk, waiting for his third ride, his brow was furrowed and his eyes fierce with concentration. “Just thinking about the business of what I’ve got to do,” he said. At his parents’ ranch, in Eakly, Oklahoma, he’d spent hours watching bull-riding videos to perfect his form. He’d been working on keeping his free hand high to help control his upper body, and his other hand pulled tight against the rope. When the calf kicked up, he needed to lean forward off its haunches, and when it broke to the side, he had to keep his butt down, centered and correct. “Riding bulls is such a mind game,” his father, Luke, told me.



A junior bull rider loaded in the bucking chute

“You can buck yourself off just as easily as anything. But he’s a little young for that. The truth is he’s on top of his game.”

Earlier that morning, the third-round draw had been posted on the wall of the tunnel to the arena. Luke peered at it for a second, then nodded with a tight grin. For once, Wacey had a buck. Calf No. 99992 had tossed his rider on the first day and hadn’t been ridden the second, so he’d be fresh. “That’s good,” Luke said. “He can score some points on that one after those sorry calves he’s had.” His wife, Nikki, wasn’t so sure. She’d seen what happened to Jet and



in the final moments before a ride. Contestants at the Youth Bull Riders World Finals range in age from four to nineteen.

Trigger. “I was kind of hoping for something a little more average,” she said, her face pale and drawn behind her shades. Wacey, though, had no doubts: he wanted that calf.

When his turn finally came, he punched his helmet and climbed into the chute. He clamped his legs around the calf’s bony, squirming back, rubbed some rosin into his rope, and wrapped it tight around his fist. “Ride him like a champ, Wace!” Jet yelled, from the catwalk above him. Trigger was there, too, grinning down at him. Then the gate flew open and the calf charged out, leaping and flexing across the arena

like a steel spring shot from an old tractor. He twisted one way and the other, jackknifed in the air and rolled his belly, but could not get the rider off. Wacey matched him rhythm for rhythm, free arm waving and heels flying, spurring him on even harder. When the buzzer sounded and he’d tumbled to his feet, he gave one of the bullfighters a high five and ran off. A little later, the m.c. announced the judges’ tally: 74.5—the highest score for a calf rider all week.

Wacey would go on to win the round and finish the rodeo in style, riding his last calf cleanly for a sixty-two. It wasn’t

quite enough to win the championship: his calf was game but underpowered, and he finished third. But his record from the previous round would stand. Shayne ended on an even better note, winning the last round. She finished third in her group as well. She and Wacey each earned a little more than a thousand dollars for their efforts—enough to cover their families’ costs and perhaps a dinner at Applebee’s on the way home. By the time the judges had cut their checks and passed them out in the hall, the Expo Center was nearly empty, its booths packed up and the parking lot deserted. The other parents had headed home hours



A former champion who is angry about the breeding of fiercer and fiercer bulls says, "You probably won't be hearing about twenty-year

ago. Their boys had a long road ahead of them, and it would soon be past their bedtime.

Watching the medics put away their ice packs and syringes, painkillers and rolls of bandages, I thought about the last time Tuff Hedeman drew Bodacious. It was December of 1995, just

seven weeks after the bull had nearly killed him. Hedeman had lost twenty-five pounds and his body was still healing, but he'd managed to qualify for the National Finals Rodeo anyway. Like Cody Custer and Lane Frost—the hero of the movie “8 Seconds,” who was killed by a bull named Takin’ Care of Business in 1989—Hedeman belonged to a gen-

eration of riders who prided themselves on never backing down. “They just had something the guys don’t have today,” Dillon Page told me. “They were raised up in the country and they got on bulls to win.” Yet when Hedeman drew Bodacious again, in the sixth round of the finals, he knew what he had to do.

“I thought at first that I might have



bull-riding careers anymore." Riders know that injury is a matter of when, not if.

done something wrong the last time," he told me. "But when I watched a video of the ride, the fact is that I was in perfect position for a bull of that calibre with that bucking pattern. There was nothing I could do. If I'd tried to lean back to avoid his head, I would have been stretched out vertically, and when his back legs hit the ground the force of the downdraft would

have jerked me off. That's why most people really feared him. He was a great bull, but he got to the point where you could ride him correctly and still nearly get killed." And so, when Hedeman's turn came to ride that night at the National Finals Rodeo, he climbed into the chute and onto Bodacious's back. But when the gate swung open, Hedeman let the bull charge

through without him. Then he tipped his hat to him and left the arena. Three rounds later, Scott Breeding put on his hockey mask and gave Bodacious his final ride.

Hedeman wouldn't trade his bull-riding experiences for anything. The closest he's come to that feeling has been flying in an F-16 fighter jet. "It's just this explosion of adrenaline," he told me. "It's indescribable." Still, when one of his sons started to get interested in the sport a few years ago, Hedeman took him into his trophy room and showed him some pictures of the guys he used to ride with. "I told him, 'Just look at them. Those are the best guys that rode every year.' Then I pointed at a few and said, 'I watched this guy die, this guy die, and this guy die. This guy's in a wheelchair and this guy's in a wheelchair.' For me, ninety per cent of it was good. I never had a life-threatening injury. But the last thing I would ever want my son to do is ride bulls. It's insane."

His son never did take up bull riding, but for other boys Hedeman's story was just the sort of cautionary tale that hooked them on the sport for life. At the Camp of Champions, I'd watched a succession of stiff-backed and patched-together men walk up to the microphone and, as the Oklahoma sun flamed and guttered on the horizon, do their best to warn the boys about what lay ahead—what a brutal, debilitating world this could be. Yet the result was only to earn more converts. "Blessed be the Lord, oh, my soul," as the cowboy preachers sang. "For I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

On the last afternoon, a cattle trough was hauled under the tent and twenty or thirty boys lined up to be baptized in it. Andy Taylor had asked the campers if any of them were ready to be born again, and Trigger, Jet, and Wacey all raised their hands. When the time came, though, only Trigger and Wacey went down easily. Jet, stripped to his swim trunks, climbed in willingly enough but then seemed to change his mind. He pushed his feet up against the end of the trough and gripped the rim tight with his hands. For just a moment, he hung there like a spider perched above a water glass. Then one of the church elders cradled his head and slowly, quivering, Jet let himself go under. ♦

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A conversation with Burkhard Bilger.

THE ART OF CONVERSATION

The curator who talked his way to the top.

BY D. T. MAX

Hans Ulrich Obrist is a curator at the Serpentine, a gallery in London's Kensington Gardens that was once a teahouse and is now firmly established as a center for contemporary art. A few years ago, *ArtReview* named him the most powerful figure in the field, but Obrist, a forty-six-year-old Swiss, seems less to stand atop the art world than to race around, up, over, and through it. On weekdays, he works at the Serpentine offices; there are meetings over budgets and fund-raising, and Obrist, with his fellow-director, Julia Peyton-Jones, selects artists to exhibit and helps them shape their shows. When I visited him in London in late August, two exhibitions that he had organized were up: "512 hours," a "durational performance" piece by Marina Abramović, and a show of computer-generated video art by Ed Atkins. But on weekends Obrist becomes who he truly is: a traveller. By his count, he has made roughly two thousand trips in the past twenty years, and while in London I discovered that he had been away fifty of the previous fifty-two weekends. He goes to meet emerging artists and check in with old ones, to see shows small and large. The kind of culture he cares about is mobile and far-flung and can be grasped better on the move. He likes to quote J. G. Ballard's claim that the most beautiful building in London is the Hilton Hotel at Heathrow Airport, and the postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha's observation that "in-betweenness is a fundamental condition of our times." Obrist is enormously fond of quoting.

On the twelve weekends before I saw him in London, H.U.O., as Obrist is known, had been in Basel, for the art fair; Ronchamp, France, for a wedding, in the chapel designed by Le Corbusier; Munich, for a talk with Matthew Barney; Berlin, where he maintains an apartment primarily to house ten thousand books,

for an interview with Rosemarie Trockel; Frankfurt, for a panel with Peter Fischli; Arles, where he is helping to design a new museum; Singapore, to meet emerging artists; Munich again, to interview the young Estonian artist Katja Novitskova; Los Angeles, for a panel on art and Instagram; Vienna, to guest-curate an exhibit of unrealized design projects; Majorca, to see Miquel Barceló's ceramic murals in the cathedral; Edinburgh, where Obrist's new memoir, "Ways of Curating," was featured at the book fair; and Vancouver, where he appeared onstage with the novelist and futurist Douglas Coupland. In all these locales, he saw as much art as he could, but he also visited scientists and historians. He believes that, because culture is becoming more interconnected across geography and across disciplines, his knowledge must expand far beyond the visual arts: to technology, literature, anthropology, cultural criticism, philosophy. These disciplines, in turn, become tools in Obrist's attempt to fertilize the arts with fresh ideas.

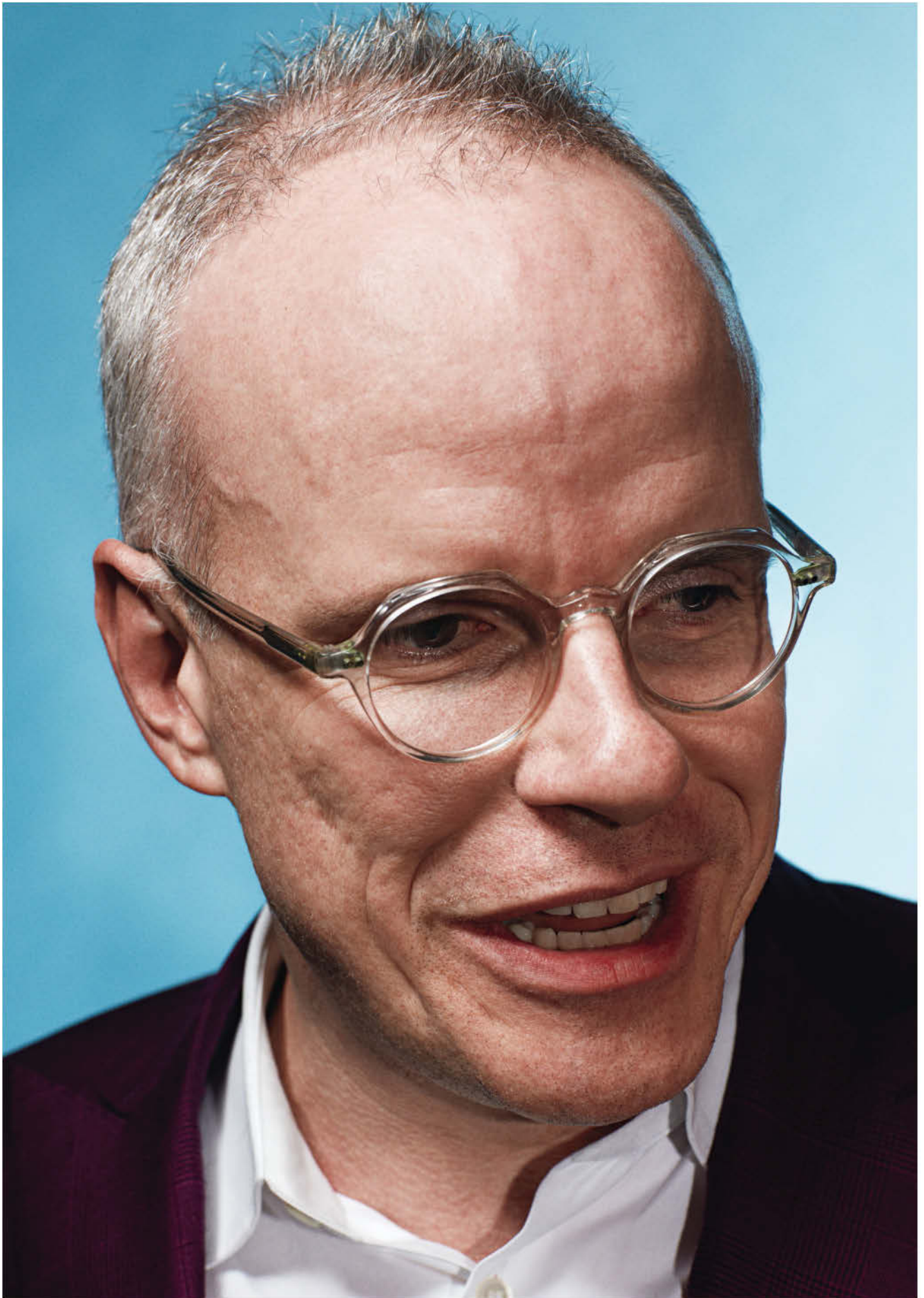
Another thing that Obrist loves to do is talk. His favorite word is "urgent," to which he gives an elongated Mitteleuropean pronunciation. His words come out in an almost comical torrent, citations bobbing up and ideas colliding. Again quoting Ballard, he describes his curatorial work as "junction-making"—between objects, between people, and between people and objects. Words help Obrist process what he's seeing, and he often channels this energy into interviews with artists and cultural figures, which he calls "salons of the twenty-first century." He has conducted twenty-four hundred hours of interviews to date, talking to artists in their studios, on planes, or as they walk. Ideally, he records them using three digital recorders, to make sure that nothing gets lost.

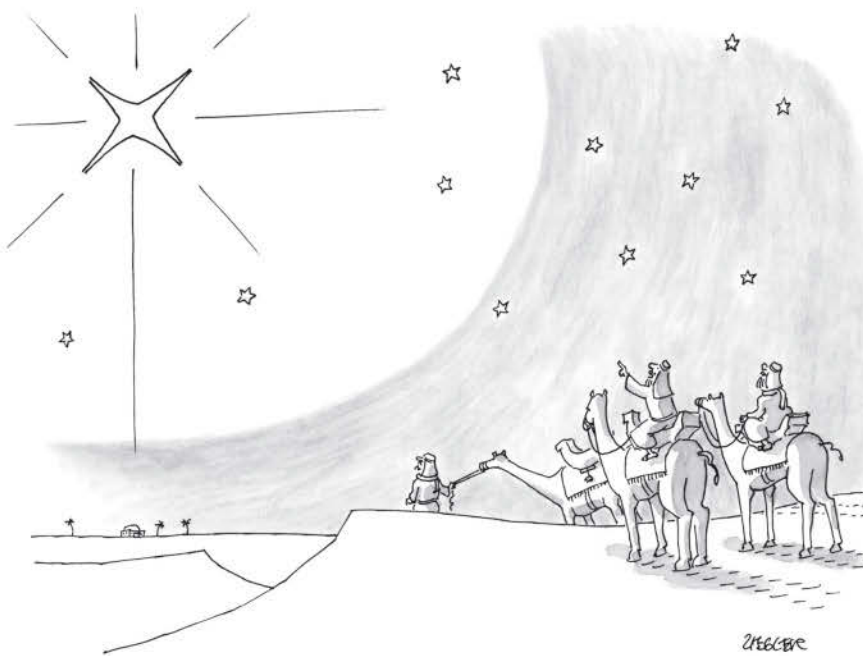
In interviews, Obrist's volubility is paired with a deep deference. The architect Rem Koolhaas, in a preface to the Obrist compendium "dontstopdontstop-dontstop," writes, "Usually those afflicted with logorrhea do not stimulate others to communicate; in his case, he rushes to let others do the talking." Obrist respects the art-world compact that though the work may be shocking, the conversation should be supportive. His questions are rarely personal, and when he is being interviewed himself he is similarly guarded: at one point, when I asked him to explain his manic personality, he said, "Maybe I'm in a permanent state of Pessoa's intransquillity." The interviews, over time, become books. He has published forty volumes of them, records of interactions with everyone from Doris Lessing to the video artist Ryan Trecartin. In all, they represent Obrist's best claim to being an artist in his own right. He likes to say that he models himself on the impresario Sergei Diaghilev.

Obrist is not interested in all art equally. He can be skeptical about painting, because at this point, he told me, it's difficult to do meaningful work in that medium. For him, art, even old art, must be speaking to something current. "I don't wake up in the morning and think about Franz Kline," he said. The art he is most passionate about doesn't hang on walls and often doesn't have a permanent emanation. It can take the form of a dance or a game or a science experiment, and often leaves nothing behind but memories and an exhibition catalogue. (Obrist has published more than two hundred catalogues.) He looks for work that responds to the current moment or anticipates the moment after this one—Obrist is obsessed with the not-yet-done. His favorite question is "Do you have any unfinished or unrealized projects?"

Much of the work that fits Obrist's

Hans Ulrich Obrist has conducted twenty-four hundred hours of interviews with creative people: "salons of the twenty-first century."





"Wow! It's beginning to look a lot like Xmas."

ephemeral aesthetic could be called relational art, a term coined by the Parisian curator Nicolas Bourriaud in the nineteen-nineties to describe work whose content cannot be separated from its communal reception. (Obrist avoids using the term "relational" himself, in part because the artists never used it.) Abramović's "512 hours" is a good example of relational art. There were few props, no script, and no installation; patrons were asked simply to join Abramović in an unadorned gallery space and conjoin their psychic energy. Another example of Obrist's taste is a work by Olafur Eliasson, the Danish-Icelandic artist, whom Obrist helped discover. Obrist was one of a team of curators who invited Eliasson to contribute to a multi-authored opera called "Il Tempo del Postino," first staged at the Manchester International Festival, in 2007. Eliasson created a piece, "Echo House," in which a reflective curtain dropped in front of the audience, showing audience members their every gesture. Each sound they made—from coughs to claps—was mimicked sonically by the orchestra. Soon the audience took the lead, improvising a score of shouts and ring tones.

These works feel modern, in part, because they mirror the group decision-

making found online; at the same time, they foster interactivity without leaving people isolated in front of screens. The Internet is always on Obrist's mind, as he scans for signs of cultural shifts. Although his shows often playfully elevate the non-artistic to the curatorial—Duchamp is a key figure—they also have a sadness to them. He clearly believes that art offers a refuge at a time when dark beasts, from capitalism to climate change, roam the earth. His friend the artist Liam Gillick sees Obrist's taste in art as made up in equal measure of "the melancholic sublime and the idea of the productive machine."

Obrist, for his part, notes that his exhibits often demonstrate what he has called a "quality of unfinishedness and incompleteness." He doesn't like art to have temporal, spatial, or intellectual limits. The white cube of the gallery irks him; closing dates bother him. He prefers to think of exhibitions as seeds that can grow. For one of Obrist's early shows, "do it," which debuted in Klagenfurt, Austria, in 1994, twelve artists created "instructions" rather than finished work. Alison Knowles, a New York artist associated with the Fluxus movement, invited visitors to bring something red and fill one of dozens of squares in the gallery space with it. The exhibition never looked the

same from day to day. Other venues soon took it on, and, over the years, artists have dropped in and the instructions have changed. The exhibition, which just celebrated its twentieth anniversary, is one of the most widely produced art shows in the world. "Do it" is the signature effort of a curator who has followed his own algorithm: see art, meet the artists, produce their shows, use these shows to meet more artists, produce their shows in turn. (In "Ways of Curating," Obrist calls social interactions "the lifeblood of any curator's metabolism.")

Every year, the Serpentine holds a Marathon—a festival that coalesces what Obrist has learned from his travels and his reading and his interviewing. It is a combination of exhibitions, performances, and panels, with writers, visual artists, and cultural historians mixed in freely. The first Marathon, in 2006, was a twenty-four-hour rolling interview session that Obrist co-hosted with Koolhaas. Afterward, Obrist was so exhausted that he had to check himself into the hospital. Koolhaas, who was then sixty-one, did not. "He was better trained, because he did a lot of sports," Obrist remembered. (Obrist now jogs every morning in Hyde Park.)

Last year's Marathon, which Obrist conceived with the French curator Simon Castets, was called "89plus," and focussed on people born that year or later. Obrist explained, "1989 was the year the Berlin Wall came down, and it was the year Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web. This is the first generation to live its life entirely on the Internet." Ryan Trecartin and some sixty others participated. Of course, two days were not enough to explore such a subject, and in Obrist's mind the exhibit never really ended. He and Castets are now planning an "89plus" event, dedicated to poetry, in Stockholm next year. In October, Obrist travelled to New York, and while he was there he held a planning meeting about "89plus" at a café in Greenwich Village. Surrounded by young poets and editors of alternative presses, he asked, "Do you know any poets who use Snapchat?" His voice was full of hope—what poetry could be more to Obrist's liking than poetry that vanishes?

Afterward, we toured art galleries. Obrist was in and out remarkably quickly,

like a man with a plane to catch. If a gallery representative took more than twenty seconds to explain a work, Obrist turned his attention to his iPhone. Though he likes to learn, he doesn't like to be told what to pay attention to. But when he saw something he really liked he paused, and a light smile crossed his lips. This happened at the New Museum, which had on display the Lebanese artist Etel Adnan's quietly bold abstract landscape paintings, along with a typescript of her book-length poem "The Arab Apocalypse." He said, "This has something of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*"—a complete, or all-encompassing, art work. The term is often associated with the sprawling operas of Richard Wagner, but for Obrist it can be something much more nimble—a protean creation that is remade over time, absorbing fresh influences from people who engage with it. Something, in other words, much like himself.

Obrist was born in Zurich and grew up in a small town near Lake Constance. His father was a comptroller in the construction industry, his mother a grade-school teacher. An only child, he found school "too slow," and other Swiss found his vitality off-putting. "People would always say that I should go to Germany," he remembered. His parents were not particularly interested in art, but on several occasions they took him to a monastery library in the nearby city of St. Gallen. He admired the antiquity of the books, the silence, the felt shoes. "You could make an appointment and, with white cloths, touch the books," he said. "That's one of my deepest childhood memories."

When he was around twelve, he took the train to Zurich, where he fell in love with "the long thin figures" at a Giacometti exhibition. Soon he was collecting postcards of famous paintings—"my *musée imaginaire*," he calls it. "I would organize them according to criteria: by period, by style, by color." One day, when he was seventeen, he went to see a show by the artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss at a Basel museum. He was engrossed by their "Equilibrium" sculptures—delicately balanced metal-and-rubber constructions. He had been reading Vasari's biographical sketches of the artists of the Renais-

sance, and it struck Obrist that he could try to meet creators, too. He reached out to Fischli and Weiss with this rap: "I'm a high-school pupil and I'm really, really obsessed by your work and I'd love to visit you." He told me, "I really didn't know what I wanted. It was just this desire to find out more." Fischli and Weiss were amused by the precocious Obrist, and welcomed him to their Zurich studio. They were filming their now famous short film "The Way Things Go," in which an old tire rolls down a ramp, knocking over a ladder and setting off a chain reaction. On his visit, Obrist discovered a sheet of brown wrapping paper on the floor with the entire Rube Goldberg schema drawn on it. "It was almost like a mind map," he said.

Soon afterward, Obrist was entranced by a Gerhard Richter exhibition in Bern, and asked Richter if he could visit his studio, in Cologne. "That took courage,"

he said. He travelled on the night train from Zurich. "When I arrived, he was working on one of his amazing cycles of abstract paintings," Obrist said. They talked for ninety minutes. Richter was astonished by Obrist's passion: "'Possessed' is the word for Hans Ulrich," he told me. Richter recommended the music of John Cage. "We discussed chance in paintings and he said he liked playing *boules*," Obrist recalled. A few months later, Obrist was in a Cologne park, playing *boules* with Richter and his friends.

Obrist doggedly arranged to meet other artists whose work he admired. He went to see Alighiero Boetti in Rome. The feverish Boetti may be the only person ever to complain that Obrist didn't talk fast enough. (In his new book, Obrist writes with delight, "Here was someone with whom I had to struggle to keep up.") When Obrist asked him how he could be "useful to art," Boetti pointed



"Can't Yelp rate dry cleaners in order of how good they keep their mouth shut?"

out the obvious: that he was born to be a curator.

Obrist wasn't sure what the job entailed, but he was intuitively drawn to the power of organizing art. As a teen-ager, he visited an exhibition at the Kunsthau in Zurich: "Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk," or "Tendency Toward the Total Work of Art." It highlighted four selections from the past hundred years of modernism: Duchamp's enigmatic glass construction "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even," and one painting each by Kandinsky, Mondrian, and Malevich. The works had been placed at the center of the Kunsthau, heightening their effect. Obrist was struck by the intelligence of the man who had organized it: Harald Szeemann. Also a Swiss, Szeemann was one of several curators who had begun to bring a new inventiveness to the age-old job of selecting art to illustrate a theme. Obrist saw the show forty-one times. (Later, of course, he interviewed Szeemann.)

Obrist did not yet feel qualified to put his stamp on the art world. He had the autodidact's anxiety about not knowing enough. For all his energy, he was not a revolutionary; he was an accumulator of information. But how to find out what artists were doing? "There wasn't then a place to study," he said. "I knew of no curator schools." So he designed his own education. He enrolled at the University of St. Gallen, and majored in economics and social sciences. When not in class, he set out to see as many shows as he could.

Switzerland is well situated if you want to make impulsive trips around Europe. Obrist spoke five languages: German, French, Italian, Spanish, and English. (His English was given a boost by Roget's Thesaurus, and he still keeps a vocabulary list in a blue notebook that he takes with him—among the latest words are "forage" and "hue.") He took the night train to avoid hotel bills and arrived in a city the next morning. "I would go to every museum and look and look again," he remembered. Then he visited local artists. He found that he could improve his welcome if he brought news of what he had seen, plus other artists' gossip and opinions. "I would go from one

city to the next, inspired by the monks in the Middle Ages, who would carry knowledge from one monastery to the next monastery," he said. At Boetti's suggestion, he also inquired about unrealized projects, as every artist had some and felt passionate about them. Above all, he listened. "I was what the French call *être à l'écoute*," he told me. His youthful intensity sometimes raised concern. Louise Bourgeois, after meeting the teen-age Hans Ulrich, sleep-deprived and suffering from a cold, called his mother in Switzerland and urged her to take better care of her son.

In 1991, Obrist, in his early twenties, finally felt ready. By then, he estimates, he had visited tens of thousands of exhibitions and knew more artists than most professional curators. He chose to hold his first show in the kitchen of his student apartment. "The kitchen was just another place I kept stacks of books and papers," he recalled. The minimalist gesture seemed appropriate, both as a reaction to the engorged art market of the eighties and as a reflection of the economic slump across Europe. It was also a playful homage: Harald Szeemann had done an exhibit in an apartment.

The idea of the show was to suggest that the most ordinary spaces of human life, cleverly curated, could be made special. Among the friends he included was the French painter and sculptor Christian Boltanski. Under the sink, Boltanski projected a film of a lit candle; the flick-

ering could be seen through the gap in the cabinet doors. "It was like a little miracle where you expect it least," Obrist remembered. He publicized the exhibit through small cards and word of mouth; still, he was relieved that only thirty people came over the three months it was open. "I was

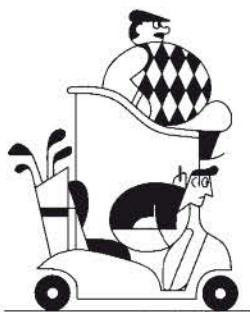
still studying and couldn't have coped with much more," he said. Among those attending was a curator from the Cartier Foundation, a contemporary-art museum in Paris. Soon afterward, Cartier offered Obrist a three-month fellowship. Obrist took it, leaving Switzerland for good.

Obrist quickly became a figure on the European art circuit. He was a clearing house for news and relationships, and he

was generous—no sooner had he met someone than he helped that person connect with others in his widening circle. If he stayed in a hotel, he cleaned out the postcards in the lobby and mailed them to everyone he could think of. "He had these big plastic bags," Marina Abramović, who met him in Hamburg in 1993, recalled. "I always wanted him to empty them and list all that was inside. . . . He would have information of every single human being—every artist living in a favela!" She remembered him as astonishingly innocent, an adjective that many still use for him. Many artists saw his unchecked commitment as a counterpart to their own. The French artist Philippe Parreno said, "For me, there is no difference between talking to him and talking to other artists. I am engaged at the same level." Obrist once conducted an interview with Parreno while driving him from the Dublin airport to Connemara, and became so deeply absorbed that he didn't realize he was on the wrong side of the street.

Obrist continued to set up shows in unusual locations. He put on an exhibit of Richter's paintings in the country house where Nietzsche wrote part of "Also Sprach Zarathustra," and a show in a hotel restaurant where Robert Walser, the Swiss writer, used to stop during long walks through the mountains. A third took place in Room 763 at the Hotel Carlton Palace, in Paris, where Obrist was then staying. In one part of the exhibit, called "The Armoire Show," nine artists created clothes for the closet. With Fischli and Weiss, he toured the Zurich sewer museum. "They had toilets and urinals on plinths and had never heard of Duchamp," he marvelled. This inspired him to put together "Cloaca Maxima," which featured art about lavatories and digestion. The show opened in 1994, in and around the Zurich sewers.

During much of the nineties, Obrist held a part-time position at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. He was the museum's "head of Migratory Curation"—a whimsical title that was, essentially, an invitation to travel and find new talent. In 1995, Julia Peyton-Jones, the director of the Serpentine, invited Obrist to put on a show there. He proposed an exhibition called "Take Me (I'm Yours)," in which visitors were



asked to leave with an object from the exhibit. It was a huge success, and many felt that Obrist had subverted the passive expectations of a museum visit: fill up on culture and leave. He had injected a note of interactivity into staid Britain. (*Frieze* was less impressed: “The viewers’ participation is rewarded with some worthless gesture or rubbish souvenir.”)

While working on the Serpentine show, Obrist rented a three-bedroom flat on Crampton Street in Elephant and Castle, then a marginal neighborhood. He had fifty copies of his house keys made and handed them out to artists and curators passing through London. Conversations with his guests often lasted through the night; then, at six in the morning, Obrist went with whoever was still awake to a nearby McDonald’s—the only place around that was open at that hour. Klaus Biesenbach, who is now the director of MOMA PS 1, in Queens, stayed with Obrist for a time. One day, Biesenbach told me, a Korean artist named Koo Jeong-A arrived. Koo, then in her mid-twenties, made delicate installations: heaps of domestic dust, an arrangement of leaves, piles of coins. Her work was ephemeral, and she hated to be interviewed. Obrist had shown some of her efforts in Paris and had invited her to set up an installation in the Crampton Street flat. In the morning, the three would meet for discussions, Biesenbach recalled. “And one morning, I remember, they came out of one room. Wow, I thought, they must have had a meeting before. Why didn’t they invite me to the meeting? And the next morning they came again out of the room.” Obrist and Koo have been together ever since.

The sharp-tongued English press continued to poke at Obrist. Adrian Searle, an art critic for the *Guardian*, wrote in 1999 that he often found Obrist’s curating “deeply irritating.” But Obrist’s coterie is less reviewers than artists, collectors, and other curators, who are almost always interested in his projects. Perhaps his greatest triumph was “Cities on the Move,” a collaboration with the Chinese curator Hou Hanru, which debuted in Vienna in 1997. It was a timely exploration of the artistic and demographic landscape of Asia—a look at what Koolhaas, a participant, called “cities of exacerbated difference.” Scaffolding permeated the installation;



“It’s your turn. I’ve run out of pleasantries for the gauntlet.”

there were rickshaw taxis festooned with fabulous colors. Conventional art work peeked out from corners. In a 1999 London incarnation of the show, Koo set up a bedroom in the gallery while finishing an installation; visitors got to see the blankets and clothes that she had left behind. This time, Searle praised Obrist: “His strengths as a kind of cross-disciplinary impresario have found their subject. He knows not only how to create chaos, but also how to curate it.”

In 2000, Obrist began to tire. He and Koo wanted a more stable base for their lives and he wanted to curate solo shows. “There is nothing deeper than to work for a year with the same artist,” he said. So he accepted an offer from the Musée de la Ville de Paris to be a full-time curator. He remained in France until 2006, when Julia Peyton-Jones made him her co-director at the Serpentine. Koo and Obrist now share a small apartment in Kensington, near the gallery. When I vis-

ited Obrist there, the closest thing to food in the kitchen was Diet Coke. The walls were almost bare. Fluorescent lights drenched a living room filled with books arranged on industrial shelving. Among the titles were Ben Lerner’s metafictional novel “10:04” and Jacques Derrida’s monograph on “the sense of touch.” I was bemused that a person who lived by his eyes lived in such a nondescript place, but Obrist’s interest in anything outside high culture is fitful. I never heard him talk about sports or favorite restaurants or how much something costs. He has never made a cup of coffee, and tried cooking only once; the phone rang and he forgot the saucepan, which caught fire.

Sleep has always seemed extraneous to Obrist. During the early nineties, he tried Balzac’s caffeine regime, drinking dozens of cups of coffee a day. Then he switched to the Da Vinci method, limiting himself to a fifteen-minute nap every three hours. Now he tries to get four or

five hours every night. He has an assistant who comes to his apartment at midnight to help him with his interviews and books. “That way, when I’m out, I know it’s time to go home,” he said. Obrist sleeps while the assistant works, then wakes up and takes over. He still likes to meet people at dawn for conversation: in 2006, he founded the Brutally Early Club, which meets at 6:30 A.M., at various sites around London. (Another of Obrist’s conceits is that modern life is characterized by a decline in ritual. He ascribes the idea to Margaret Mead.)

Obrist first appeared on *ArtReview*’s most-powerful list in 2002, and by 2009 he had risen to the top. His rolling-suitcase approach to life seemed to reflect signal changes in the art world, which was becoming faster, bigger, and vastly more international. London alone has about eight times as many galleries as it had in 1980, and Beijing and Baku and Mexico City compete for attention with Paris and New York. Increasingly, the most powerful curators are those who have the stamina (and the budget) to see enormous amounts of art and distill it into themes and movements. Among the frequent fliers are Biesenbach, of PS 1; Daniel Birnbaum, of the Moderna Museet, in Stockholm; and Massimiliano Gioni, of the New Museum, in New York. Obrist and Biesenbach first met, by chance, on a night train to Venice in 1993, on the way to the Biennale. Biesenbach, who was putting on shows in Berlin, was trying to sleep, and Obrist plunged into his compartment and kept him up the whole night. “We discussed how it’s urgent to capture the Berlin moment,” Obrist recalled. Five years later, they helped put together the first Berlin Biennial, and they have been close collaborators ever since. Birnbaum, who started out as a critic and then became a dean at an art academy, was spurred to become the sort of roving international curator Obrist is after years of conversation with him. “Hans is enthusiastic, and somehow he can make other people enthusiastic,” Birnbaum said. Obrist was also one of Gioni’s original guideposts. As a university student at Bologna, Gioni began a correspondence with Obrist that informed his practice when he entered the art world. “He really established curating as a term, a discipline, an M.O.,” Gioni said, adding, “The Dadaists had

THE GUEST ROOM

One gray dove circles the ruins.
A jet heads to the base.

A boy sings to the bird.
He carries a blue gas cannister.

*Where shall I go?
I have no home.*

*I had a place
but guests came*

*and they remained.
Where shall I go?*

He leads us through the village.
One cockerel. A pile of shoes

outside a curtained door.
We sit on orange cushions.

Children bring us tea and bread.
I wish we had brought gifts.

I hope we know when to leave.

—PJ Harvey

Tzara, the Surrealists Breton, the futurists Marinetti, and now the international global art world has Hans Ulrich Obrist.”

In many ways, an Obrist generation is running the nonprofit art world. In 2010, Jens Hoffmann, the top curator at the Jewish Museum, who considers Obrist his mentor, wrote in the magazine *Mousse*: “Almost all of the innovative work done by exhibition makers in mainstream art institutions over the last decade owes much to ideas that Obrist first introduced.” Not everyone considers this a good thing. Claire Bishop, an art historian at CUNY, told me, “The world of contemporary art is fast-moving and superficial and demands constant feeding, and he’s a prime example.”

Though Obrist is often assumed to be the kind of megalomaniac who is more prominent than the artists he shows—and who is willing to crush the heterogeneity of artists’ work in order to extract coherent themes—that assumption doesn’t properly capture him. He seems as egoless as he is guileless and stateless.

Liam Gillick said, “When you work with him, he absolutely protects you and creates enormous space for what you need to do—and yet no one knows he’s done it.” Indeed, it’s hard to reconcile the idea that Obrist is a domineering superstar with the fact that nearly all his shows are collaborations with other curators. As Gillick puts it, “He stands against a certain sort of very assertive, very authored curating that was prominent when we were young. He has a real anti-authoritarian streak.”

I first met Obrist in Los Angeles, in July. He was there to conduct one of his periodic checks on the city’s art galleries. He also planned to visit the studios of John Baldessari, Ed Ruscha, and Chris Burden, and attend the L.A. Biennial, at the Hammer Museum. Finally, there was the panel on Instagram to host. Obrist is an avid user of the medium, and has more than a hundred thousand followers.

The story of how he discovered Instagram is typical. During a breakfast in

Obrist's first stop in L.A. was at Baldessari's studio, in Venice. He arrived

We entered the studio through a gate. “Every visit to Los Angeles begins with John, and has for twenty years,” Obrist told me. Baldessari, eighty-three, tall and shambly, greeted us. Baldessari has contributed work to various Obrist exhibitions, and would happily do so again. “He’s like a good mom,” he told me. “‘Everything my son has done is good.’” He took us to a room where new work lined the walls. The Städel Museum, in Frankfurt, had commissioned him to reinterpret paintings from its collection; he had responded by creating large panels that juxtaposed fragments of text from screenplays with visual details scanned from works at the Städel. In one panel, movie dialogue in which

Afterward, we sat in Baldessari's study, amid tables on casters stacked neatly with art magazines. "Well, that's what I've been up to," Baldessari said.

Soon, Obrist was back in the S.U.V. Baldessari's work had prompted an idea: it was wise not to "isolate contemporary art" but to "create a continuum with history." Baldessari's project not only enlisted the spectator in making meaning; it created a junction between the living and the dead. Just as old art must look forward, new art should look back.

Obrist's next visit was to Ruscha, whose studio is a low unmarked building in Culver City, five miles away. Baldessari and Obrist have a rapport: they are both



"Are you still using that outlet?"

impersonally personable. Ruscha has a cooler nature, and though he recognizes Obrist's centrality in the art world—"I see his name pretty much constantly"—he is also skeptical of him. "His telephone is continually tingling and leaving twicks and tweets and all that," he told me, adding, "I'm like one little fragment of his interest."

Ruscha took Obrist out back to an open-air studio to show him new works in his "Psycho Spaghetti Western" series, which was inspired by roadside debris. Ruscha did not seem like Obrist's kind of artist: his paintings have a deeply American irony that seemed destined to elude the earnest Swiss. But Obrist sought, as always, to make a connection. The strewn objects on Ruscha's canvases, he declared, reminded him of "In the Country of Last Things," a dystopian novel by Paul Auster.

The tour finished. Ruscha took a seat behind a cherrywood desk, and fixed Obrist with his blue eyes, a dog at his feet. Obrist asked where the new paintings would be exhibited, but it was not as easy to gain traction with Ruscha as it had been with Baldessari.

"In Rome. At the Gagosian gallery."

Obrist, name-dropping, said that he'd once visited Cy Twombly at his studio in Rome. Ruscha didn't seem to care. Obrist then expressed admiration

for "Guacamole Airlines," a book of drawings that Ruscha had made.

"That was forty years ago," Ruscha said.

This must have been what it was like when Obrist was a youth, surrounded by taciturn Swiss. Obrist's arms tend to go into motion when there is silence. He asked Ruscha about a show the artist had organized at Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum, in 2012. "What did you do, exactly?" Obrist asked.

Ruscha said that he had taken some "meteorites and stuffed animals and some Old Masters" and put them on display. He had included one of his own paintings.

"One no longer isolates so much of contemporary art," Obrist said, sharing his latest epiphany. "The contemporary is now connected to the historical."

Ruscha continued to smile. Eventually, he said, "They told me not to go throwing that word 'curator' around. I was told I was just assembling an exhibit."

"Maybe we need a new word," Obrist said.

"Yah."

"I don't want to take more of your time," Obrist said, after a moment.

On his way out, Obrist asked Ruscha to contribute to his Instagram project. Ruscha told me later, "I gave him something that said, 'On the bag before the tag.' Some baseball announcer said that."

He added that he had no idea what Instagram was. Obrist, in turn, didn't catch the baseball reference.

The next day, Obrist went to visit Burden, who lives in Topanga Canyon, north of the city. He was excited: Burden was an important performance artist in the seventies, and Obrist admires the installations that he has been making in recent years. Outside the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Burden created a dense plot of refurbished lamp-posts—a glowing garden that has become an actual junction for nighttime visitors. Burden also creates elaborate toys and contraptions that speak to the geeky side of Obrist, as Fischli and Weiss did long ago.

After climbing a rugged road, we arrived at the top of a small mountain. Burden met us at the door. Squat and muscular, he looked as if he had been lifting weights and was still mad at them. "I can give you a tour," he said. "Or maybe you have something to tell me." He didn't want photographs taken of his hangar-like studio. "Next thing you know, they're on your Web site," he said. Obrist put his recorder away. But he is adept at winning over artists. After touring the studio, they went outside, past rows of lampposts, ordnance shells, and mermaid caryatids. Soon they were clambering around on a forty-foot steel tower Burden had built, like two boys with a giant erector set.

Back inside, Obrist asked him about unrealized projects.

"I had a dream of building this city called Xanadu," Burden said. He showed Obrist some drawings.

"That is a huge unrealized project!" Obrist said. He clapped his hands with pleasure.

"A real city that no one lives in."

"That's awfully exciting. I had no idea about this!" He promised to visit Burden again on his next trip. As the S.U.V. careered down the hill, Obrist checked his e-mails and texts and pronounced the visit "super-super-productive."

In mid-October, Obrist put on the Serpentine's ninth annual Marathon, in Hyde Park. The press had framed the show, "Extinction: Visions of the Future," as a depressing alternative to the ebullient Frieze Art Fair taking place in Regent's Park. Nevertheless, the Serpentine event drew a crowd, with more



than four thousand attendees. It had a carnival feel, underscored by three big Mylar balloons, spelling out “HUO,” that were tethered to a tent where the speakers gathered. When I arrived, Obrist, wearing a blue single-breasted suit, was making rapid-fire introductions among the gathered artists, ecologists, writers, researchers, activists, sages, and prognosticators. He seemed to be going slightly mad.

Obrist told me that his own unrealized project is to found a new version of Black Mountain College, the defunct North Carolina retreat where, sixty years ago, top practitioners in the arts, culture, and the sciences taught and exchanged ideas. That ambition, combined with his admiration for Diaghilev, had shaped the Serpentine event. The guiding presence was the eighty-eight-year-old artist Gustav Metzger, who had sat through the entire first Marathon. Although he is ailing and in a wheelchair, he attended nearly all of this year’s proceedings. Obrist, in his opening remarks, declared that Metzger—a longtime environmental activist—had helped inspire the theme of “Extinction.” Julia Peyton-Jones, who sometimes plays the goof to Obrist’s *Luftmensch*, dedicated the Marathon to the pangolin—an adorable, endangered mammal that looks like an anteater.

The performances and the talks took place on a small stage with a backdrop of an oversized hand pointing at black trash bags. To begin, several scientists delivered bad news. At least eight hundred and seventy species had been wiped out in the past four hundred years. Jonathan Baillie, of the London Zoological Society, noted that, of the seven remaining northern-white rhinos, one had died the previous day, in Kenya. Jennifer Jacquet, an environmental social scientist at New York University, spoke about the decimation of the Steller’s sea cow, which was hunted for sport—and for its blubber—in the eighteenth century.

Suddenly, Gilbert & George, the painting duo known for cheeky irony, came onstage, in bespoke nibbed suits and bright-colored ties. They unfurled spray-painted posters. “BURN THAT BOOK,” Gilbert’s said. “FUCK THE PLANET,” George’s said. They were lampooning the ignorance of climate-change deniers, but the audience wasn’t sure what to make of them. After a few more speak-

ers, Obrist stood up. “Coffee breaks are urgent!” he said.

Later in the day, Stewart Brand, who created the “Whole Earth Catalog,” amused the crowd when he took a showy tumble off the stage, to impersonate the death of a lemming. Brand then spoke about efforts to clone extinct species. Passenger pigeons would come first, he promised, then mammoths. The more excited Brand got, the more uncomfortable the audience seemed.



Obrist informed me that his friend John Brockman, a science impresario and literary agent, had selected most of the scientists. “We don’t know the important scientists, and they don’t know the good artists,” Obrist explained. Perhaps as a result, the science had an austere implacability to it, and the art often seemed to aestheticize tragedy. Benedict Drew, a young English artist, created a hectic digital montage that included a disembodied head and images of a garbage dump intercut with ominous messages. (“We are done for.”) The piece, weighed down with sinister synthesizer music, was called “Not Happy.” When the words “Why you so happy Pharrell” flashed, the audience laughed in relief.

At times, the worlds of science and art came together: an oddly moving presentation by Trevor Paglen focussed on communication satellites that will circle the earth for billions of years after humans are extinct. But most of the time the scientists conveyed the information and the artists the hurt. A bewildering variety of extinctions were invoked: of plants, of gays, of languages, of books on paper, of celluloid film. Obrist, surrounded by half-drunk cups of coffee, got up to introduce presenters and then sat back down in the front row, where he and Peyton-Jones, who sat by his side, passed notes to each other and to their assistants, who sat behind them.

The Marathon ended with a new par-

ticipatory piece by Yoko Ono that was read aloud by Lily Cole, a model and environmental activist, for which the audience was given small bells to ring.

“Don’t try to change the world, that’s a concept floating on our horizon,” Cole read. “Just use your wits and change your heads.” On a large screen by the stage, the words “Surrender to Peace” appeared. In the audience, bells prettily chimed.

The message seemed at odds with much of the Marathon. Wasn’t changing the world the point? Then again, there was not a single policy official among the eighty participants. The real goal, it seemed, was to conjure a sense of community. “It was quite magical,” Obrist said of the chorus of bells. “The participants did at least fifty per cent of the work.” He added that “smaller actions can lead to bigger actions.”

Obrist had brought together an eye-catching roster of participants, but epic conversation was not well suited to addressing the urgent topic of extinction. It sometimes seems that Obrist doesn’t care so much what people say, as long as they keep talking. In 2003, Hal Foster, an art historian at Princeton, published an essay that touched on Obrist’s first collection of interviews. “Formlessness in society might be a condition to contest rather than to celebrate in art,” Foster pointed out. Nothing at the Marathon was as strong as a Metzger work titled “Flailing Trees”: twenty-one willows planted upside down in concrete. The installation was first displayed in 2009, at the Manchester International Festival. Metzger had been included in that festival at Obrist’s suggestion, and it had been a smart one: “Flailing Trees” is rigorous, beautiful, sad.

After the Marathon, Obrist told me that the performance artist Tino Seghal had watched a live stream of the Marathon and had especially enjoyed a talk by Elizabeth Povinelli, an anthropologist at Columbia. “Tino’s reading her book now!” Obrist said. Who knew what collaborations might result? This was a different sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, he said—“one more in time than in space.” As the crowd dispersed, H.U.O. posed in front of the balloons with his initials. “This topic isn’t going to be solved in a night,” he said. “I see the ‘Extinction’ Marathon as a movement.” Then he noted, “I have a five-forty train in the morning. The Eurostar to Paris.” ♦



REVIEW
END

*Tim
Parks*

After his mother died, Thomas started thinking about his father. All too frequently, while she was dying, there had been talk of her going to meet him in Paradise, returning to the arms of her husband of thirty-two years, who had died thirty-two years before she did. This would be bliss.

Thomas did not believe in such things, of course, though it was hard not to try to imagine them, if only to savor the impossibility of the idea: the two insubstantial souls greeting each other in the ether, the airy embrace. She had been ninety at death, he sixty. There would be some adjustment for that, presumably, in Heaven. The madness of it confirmed one's skepticism.

But even assuming that she *had* gone to meet him, who was he? Who was he now? Who was he then? Who was my father? Thomas thought. And why was he asking himself these questions now? That wasn't clear. They weren't exactly urgent. On the other hand, they weren't going away. He didn't feel like doing research, putting his father's name into Google or delving into archives. He could have looked at his father's old sermon notes. Thomas's sister had taken some papers when their mother's house was sold, after the funeral. The notes would have told him something, reminded him of his father's handwriting, of the way the man thought. But he didn't want to do that. The thought of his father's sermons aroused unpleasant emotions. It was difficult to put his finger on the reason. A sense of embarrassment and irritation. What he wanted, rather, was to assemble a picture of his father as he, Thomas, remembered him. Who was he *for me*? A son should be able to say what his father was for him. What part of my personality do I owe him? How does this man still simmer in my life? If he does.

Occasionally, Thomas would tell himself that he regretted not having asked his mother more about his father while she was alive. That would surely have been the moment to undertake this reappraisal. Now all his mother's memories of his father had died with her. He'd never be able to access them. Yet he didn't actually regret not asking her. The truth was that for all this chatter about her going to meet him in the beyond, for all her occasional tears when Father was

mentioned, Thomas's mother had spoken very little of his father. Very little. Perhaps the only time his name could reliably be expected to come up was when Thomas and his mother argued over something, usually something of a religious or political nature. Thomas could be provocative, stubborn, and his mother never wanted to lose an argument about things that mattered. Then, between exasperation and amusement, she would say, "You're just like your father, Thomas. He loved to play devil's advocate, too!"

How was this possible? His father had been a clergyman. Thomas couldn't remember the man expressing a single idea that went against orthodox Christianity. How could Mother remember him playing devil's advocate? Presumably, in their own private relationship, Father had liked to get her riled, flustered, indignant. And this had been partly, though perhaps not altogether, in fun. "He loved to split hairs, just like you," Thomas's mother said, shaking her gray head. She did not say which hairs Father had split, and Thomas had not asked her to expand.

Why hadn't Thomas questioned her reticence during her lifetime? It was not that he suspected that there was some secret being hidden from him. It was more as though she'd wanted to keep the man to herself. Perhaps she had been afraid that speaking of Father to Thomas would diminish him. Because Father was so devout and Thomas such a doubter. Speaking about him might have given her son a chance to make some disparaging remark, or simply to show once again that he didn't believe. To rock the boat. That was a favorite expression of Father's: Don't rock the boat! In any event, she had kept whatever there was between them in her heart, to the end. In her bedroom, there was a photo of Thomas's father as a young man, and on the glass frame below his face she had placed a small square of white paper with a few lines of religious poetry:

Death hides—
But it cannot divide.
Thou art but on
Christ's
Other side.
Thou with Christ
And Christ with me
And so together
Still are we.

Thomas respected this carefully preserved bereavement. He didn't investi-

gate. He knew that when the cancer had gone to his father's brain he had accused his mother of all kinds of unpleasant things and that this had upset her greatly. Never for one moment did Thomas imagine that there was any truth in those accusations. It was just that the cancer had gone to Dad's head. And who does one accuse, when accusing, if not one's wife of thirty years? Thomas knew plenty about that. It even occurred to him that he was thinking about his father now because, in separating from his own wife, he had undone, as it were, the last thing that his father had done as a clergyman, when he'd married them, Thomas and his wife, holding their ringed hands one above the other and declaring, "Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Recently, in preparation for the divorce, Thomas had had to dig out the marriage certificate with Father's signature on it. It seemed odd to think that his father's hand had pressed on that very paper. Thirty-two years ago. His handwriting was scratched and sharp, but not without a certain angular elegance. Thomas examined the certificate for a few minutes, looking at his own signature, his wife's, his father's, then put it in an envelope with the other papers, ready for his divorce.

Whore. That was it. Just once his mother had talked about it. They had been speaking about her cancer, he remembered. She was lucky, she said, because hers hadn't gone to her head. Like poor Dad's. Then she burst into tears and told Thomas that, in his madness before he died, Father had said all kinds of awful things; he had called her a whore. Shocked, Thomas immediately reassured his mother that it had been the disease speaking. She knew that. In his right mind Dad would never have said such a thing. Later, Thomas realized that she had told him this in order to receive his reassurance before dying herself. Once reassured, she didn't tell him anything else.

Edward Sanders was born in Liverpool, on the longest day of the year, in 1920. He'd had two sisters, one definitely younger. Perhaps both had been younger. Thomas could have asked his own brother or sister about this—they were older than him, they might

know—but he didn't want his brother and sister to know that he was thinking about his father. Why not? He didn't want to pool their collective memories. He didn't want to have to adjust his views in the light of their knowledge. Vaguely he was aware that Mother had spoken of Father's being fond of Doris, the youngest sister. But, so far as he could recall, Father had never spoken of her. He had never spoken of his mother, either. All Thomas remembered, from perhaps two visits when he was very small, was a tiny old woman with white wispy hair and a hooked nose.

Was his father deliberately enigmatic? Edward Sanders had talked once of his father, Thomas's grandfather. They were on holiday in South Devon, and Father had wanted to visit Plymouth Sound, because his father's ship had been mothballed there during the Great Depression. Thomas's grandfather had been a ship's captain, and Father had spent an unemployed summer with him on that ship, waiting for world commerce to start moving again. It must have been a happy time for him, because he got quite excited as they walked along the shore, pointing out where the ship had been, the landing stage they'd rowed to when they went ashore.

Thomas had the impression that his father had wanted to become a seaman, too, but had been held back by his poor eyesight. His eyesight was so poor that neither the Army nor the Navy had accepted him. He couldn't even get a driver's license. So while his own hero father had fought submarines in the Atlantic, he'd worked in Cammell Laird shipyard, doing technical drawings for marine engines. One of the happiest stories Father liked to tell was about how he was admired for his ability to hit rats with a paperweight in the shipyard workshops. It was strange to think that he couldn't see well enough to join the Navy or drive a car but was perfectly capable of drawing engines and hitting rats with paperweights.

Father had never spoken of his reasons for becoming a clergyman. But Thomas did know that his father and mother had initially planned to be mis-

sionaries. They had met at missionary training college. They had wanted an adventurous life. It was 1948; they'd just lived through a war, but only on the edge of the action. She had been bombed in London, he in Liverpool. Her father had forbidden her to join the Wrens. His father had been disappointed that his son couldn't enlist. Now they would fight the good fight another way.



Thomas's parents' marriage, he realized now, was based on a religious mission. They were partners in a task: to make the world a better place by converting people to the faith. That was the logic of their being together. If either of them lost this faith, their marriage would be lost with it.

Wouldn't it? Their life was a life in the Church, for the Church, though, for reasons that were never explained, they hadn't in the end become missionaries. Perhaps having produced children made them less eligible. The Church didn't want to be responsible for little white children in Uganda or Indonesia. Maybe we children blocked Father's career, Thomas thought. We frustrated his ambitions. First the eyesight problem, then his children. He remembered the man's impatience. His father had no time for chatter. Sometimes he barely took time to eat. He was impatient with Mother, too, impatient to be doing. But doing what? Winning souls for Christ. How strange. And how disappointing for him, then, to have failed first and foremost with two of the three souls under his nose, Thomas and his older brother.

He took our salvation for granted, Thomas thought.

Once he had decided to make the effort, it didn't take Thomas long to gather these thoughts and type them on his computer. If only because there were so few. Thomas was living in a small flat now, away from his wife, whom he had left some time ago. Away from his children, who were grown up now. They no longer needed him for protection. Only for financial support. Yet he did not feel as though he had really got away. It was as if he had left home to climb a mountain and was now stuck on top of it, bivouacked above the

tree line, free, but freezing, with no way forward. Thomas was perplexed. His wife was down in the warm pastures waiting for him. So it seemed. But he wouldn't go back.

There were memories of infancy and memories of adolescence. There were two or three incidents that seemed important. Watershed moments. During Thomas's early childhood, his father had seemed busy and happy. He preached and led meetings. First in Manchester, then in Blackpool. He was charismatic and embattled. He liked a fight. His voice was vibrant. He made jokes. He was a leader. People came to him for advice. At breakfast and lunch and dinner he said grace. In the evening, before bed, he said prayers. They were fervent, earnest prayers, the prayers of someone going to Heaven, or to Hell. He wasn't interested in empty, formal religion. He liked his lamb and his roast beef, his plum pie and his custard. But he was always impatient to be up and doing again. Thomas distinctly remembered his father thrusting his chair back and wiping gravy from his mouth with a white napkin. People said "serviette" then. His father had had a rather slack mouth, poor teeth, but he was always clean-shaven. He was always ready to be meeting people. To be saving their souls. Thomas could actually see the gravy stain on the crumpled napkin as his father hurried off.

But he couldn't see his father's face. Thomas tried and tried, but he couldn't quite see it. In the small apartment he lived in now, he kept no photos of the past. He had no family heirlooms. What had Father looked like? A thin handsome nose, definitely; sandy hair, but receding; gray-green eyes, very thick spectacles. Father was endlessly cleaning his spectacles, usually with a huge white handkerchief. Thomas could see the vigorous action of the hands rubbing the lenses with the cloth. But he couldn't put eyes and nose together. He couldn't remember looking into those eyes, or them looking into his. The handkerchief was in the way.

Father's body was easier. Thomas remembered an aura of vulnerability, at once wiry and hunched, tense. But not intimidated. He didn't keep fit, but rode a bike to visit parishioners. At the church, they hated him, because he had

banned the annual crowning of the May Queen. It was paganism, he said; it had nothing to do with Our Lord Jesus Christ and his message of joy and salvation. He hadn't become a clergyman to perpetuate pagan rituals and crown pretty girls.

Once, Father took Thomas to a holiday camp with some boys from a reform school. That was frightening. They were wild. They jumped off swings in motion to see who could leap the farthest. They yelled swearwords and made rude gestures. Some of them had been sent to the school for robbery or violence. Father didn't seem to have any trouble talking to these boys or saving their souls. Perhaps he felt that it was missionary work. He felt fulfilled. If Thomas had sworn or made those gestures, Dad would have been furious.

It was also scary when Father talked about death and burials. There was a story about a coffin that floated in the muddy water after a storm and another that had to be forced down into the grave, because it was too long. The corpse had been a giant. In the end, Dad and the sexton had had to stand on the coffin to get it underground and even then they buried it at a forty-five-degree angle. It seemed strange to Thomas that his father could laugh at death. It seemed strange when he changed from his ordinary clothes into his robes, the long black cassock and starched white surplice, when he raised his arms outward and upward at the end of the blessing, so that he was like an angel. "May the Lord bless you and keep you!" His voice rang around the brown stones of the church. "May the Lord cause his face to shine upon you!" Later, the same man would chase Thomas and his brother back to bed if they crept down the stairs to spy on guests. "Scalawags!" he yelled. Sometimes he got seriously angry with Thomas's brother and spanked him. "I *will* have the last word," he said. "I will *thrash* the stubbornness out of you." It was frightening. But reassuring, too, in a way. Thomas had never been spanked, that he could recall. I was the good boy, he realized. Or the shrewd one.

When Thomas was nine or ten, his father had had a breakdown. "Nervous breakdown" was the expression they used then. He had been supposed to

preach. The moment had come to go up into the pulpit, but he had been unable to. He had had to go home. Perhaps the pagan people of Blackpool had finally got the better of him. Afterward, Thomas's family had gone on the longest holiday they ever took together. A month in Devon. They had stayed in an abandoned zoo, of all things, sleeping in old animal houses that had been converted into holiday cabins.

Soon after Father's breakdown and that holiday, they had left Blackpool and moved to London. This was one of the watersheds, and, looking back, Thomas realized that his memories of Father from this point on were rather different, rather sadder. The expression "new challenge" was used, though Thomas didn't know who had said it. Dad was given a new challenge: a big church in a thriving well-to-do suburb of London. People in high places believed in him. He was a man who needed to give energy where energy would be well received. An evangelical cannot thrive in a world of May Queens. Or not for long.

At school, Thomas had to drop his northern accent to avoid being laughed at. Did Father have to change his accent in the pulpit? To suit the good folk of North London? Thomas had no recol-

lection. Thinking about this now, he found it odd. Life had slipped by unnoticed. Or perhaps he, Thomas, at ten years old, had been so focussed on his new life—the need to make new friends, the new vicarage with the big garden, the bus to school, and later the bus *and* tube to another school, right in the heart of London—so taken by all this novelty that he had barely noticed his father, who went on preaching in much the same way, it seemed to Thomas, albeit from a different pulpit.

Did he have any recollection of talking to Father, one on one, during this period, in his adolescence, about anything that mattered? Girls, sex, religion, smoking, drinking? He did not. He really didn't. What Thomas did remember, though, was the growing antagonism between his father and his brother, and his father's frustration over his sister's failure at school. He remembered these things because they had caused him pain. His sister was a good Christian, but not smart. One day, she had run away from school, because she couldn't face her teachers. Father was angry with her. She locked herself in the bathroom, and he banged on the door with his fists. "You *shall* come out!" Mother tried to mediate, but she was shocked, too: they hadn't expected this



"Permission to treat the witness like gum stuck to the bottom of my heel?"

of his sister. Meanwhile, his brother grew his hair long, smoked cigarettes and dope, drank, had inappropriate girlfriends, and listened to evil music. But he did well in school and could beat Father at chess, which was not easy.

Thomas saw clearly now how his father had failed to see things clearly then. He had failed to accept that his daughter was not going to do well at school and that his son was not going to be a staunch Christian. He had allowed these entirely ordinary developments to frustrate him beyond measure. He had castigated himself. He saw the failings as his own, because it was unthinkable that they could be God's. Meanwhile, Thomas did well enough at school and toed the line at church. He was sent to a school some miles away, to keep him from his brother's evil influence. And his behavior was exemplary. Thomas did not smoke or listen to psychedelic music, and, when he swore, it was out of the earshot of parents and sister.

Yet even Thomas was not quite what his father wanted. He preferred literature to the sciences, and Father was convinced that the truth lay in the sciences, the sciences and theology. Everything else was wishy-washy humanism. At church, Thomas was more obedient than fervent. He went to church only because he would feel guilty if he didn't. He would feel he had let his parents down. Of course, he would have preferred it himself if he had felt fervent about church. He would have liked to like his duties. It would have been such a relief. But, try as he might, he didn't.

All this was in the air but never talked about. Father could hardly complain, because there was objectively nothing in Thomas's behavior to complain about. Father could confront Thomas's sister when she hid in the bathroom instead of going to school. He could confront Thomas's brother when he was caught smoking at his bedroom window or when he started to paint pictures of naked women and said he wanted to go to art college. For better or for worse, there was a relationship there; there was heat. Father would bang on the bathroom door; he would shout. Sometimes he would even strike Thom-

as's brother, then afterward he'd be fearfully friendly, because he had overdone it. He would embrace him, and Thomas's sister, too.

But there was nothing he could shout at Thomas about. So, in a way, Thomas didn't have a relationship with his father, as the others did. Now that he thought about it, Thomas could not remember a single conversation with his father throughout his teens. Nothing. Not one exchange of any import or intimacy at all. When he had found that verse in the Bible, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot," he knew the words were meant for him. His father was a hot man. His balding dome flamed with color when his anger got the better of him. His brother was a cool customer. "Temper, temper," he needled their sister. But Thomas was neither. "So then because thou art lukewarm," the Good Book said, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." That was how God felt about it. Mr. Lukewarm, Thomas thought. I am Mr. Lukewarm.

It was a Saturday evening now, and Thomas was alone, sitting at his computer screen. It had been a pleasant enough day—he had gone swimming, shopping, had lunch with a friend. But now he began to feel anxious. Now he began to understand where all this was leading, these reflections that he had avoided for thirty years. The truth was that although he had talked to a lawyer about divorce, although he had got the documents, Thomas still hadn't quite done the deed. He saw that now. The thought of that final confrontation with his wife, the signing of the documents, pained him. You are marooned, Thomas told himself. Mothballed. For the depression.

He thought again of that rainy Saturday morning when, short of breath and nauseated, his father had led his younger son in the awesome promise: *With this ring . . . with this ring . . . I thee wed . . . I thee wed.* First his father's voice, then his own, as they stood face to face at the bottom of the chancel steps. *With my body . . . with my body . . . I thee worship . . . I thee worship.* It seemed to Thomas now that that must have been the most intimate moment they had ever known. *In the name of the father . . .*

In the name of the father . . . and of the son . . . and of the son. How old had Father been that day, the day before his cancer was diagnosed, the day of the very last ceremony he would ever perform, not knowing it was the last? Fifty-nine. Dad had been fifty-nine. How old was Thomas now? Fifty-eight.

Thomas was electrified. This was what he had come back to his father for. To ask himself what the man's life had been like in his fifties, when the family melodrama was over and the decisive battle lost. But easy does it. Put it all in order, Thomas thought, before jumping to conclusions. Go back. Back back back to adolescence.

The most memorable development that had to do with his father, the most decisive watershed, was the Charismatic Movement. His parents had at first resisted, then succumbed to the excitement. It must have been an evangelical version of the '68 aberration, the need for upheaval and change. Certainly there was an American influence. Soon Mother and Father were reading out I Corinthians 12 at every opportunity, St. Paul's account of the gifts of the spirit: there were words of wisdom, gifts of healing, gifts of prophecy. Then, one Sunday morning, the curate raised his arms on the chancel steps and spoke in tongues. It sounded babbled and weird, and the man's face was ecstatic. This was the baptism in the spirit. Needless to say, many parishioners were disgusted. Then Thomas had heard his father and his mother doing the same thing in their bedroom. Babbling. Then his father had declared in church that he believed in these gifts—it was the Renewal they had all been praying for—and he, too, had spoken in tongues from the chancel steps and raised his arms to Heaven in ecstasy when singing a hymn. Thomas couldn't remember now which hymn. All hymns at the time had seemed painful to him, laden with sad sentiment, with some sticky emotion that held you back. To sing a hymn was to struggle through warm mud, to feel the impossibility of ever growing up and being free.

Very soon, the pressure on the children began. They, too, must be baptized in the spirit. They, too, must speak in tongues. It was never declared overtly, but it was obvious that if you weren't, if you didn't, then you couldn't be part of

YOU WILL
TRAVEL IN A LAND
OF MARVELS.

—JULES VERNE

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"The siege was yesterday."

the inner fellowship, the core family. His sister got there in no time at all. In no time at all, she was babbling away and praising God and talking about the Latter Days. It made school exams seem rather less important. Thomas fudged it, of course. Thomas pretended he was on board, but mostly studied for his O levels. His parents wouldn't want to stop him studying, would they? Thomas did try to see if he could speak in tongues; he might even have liked to, had it come naturally. With all the sincerity he could muster, he asked God for guidance and hazarded a few nonsense words; they were not convincing. Meanwhile, people noticed that he did not raise his hands during the hymns. He couldn't. All in all, it was getting harder and harder to keep your head down.

Sitting at his computer screen now, Thomas saw that Father had embraced this heady Charismatic stuff to break a

deadlock, to make something happen in his life. He hadn't been able to go to sea like his own father. He hadn't become a missionary in exotic lands. It was true that many souls had been won for Jesus, but then they had drifted away again. People blew hot and cold. The May Queen had been abolished, but no doubt she had returned after the reforming vicar had grown too depressed and disheartened to climb the pulpit stairs. There had been the new challenge in London, and he had risen to it—he had done well, the congregation had flourished—but his daughter had failed at school, his older son was an atheist, a smoker, and a libertine, and his youngest child a mere conformist, a cowardly sail-trimmer.

Father had written a book in those years, on the Holy Trinity, but it had not been accepted. Or, rather, it had been accepted, but only by some minor publisher, not the publisher he'd wanted. It

had not made an impression. Exactly what was in the book Thomas didn't know. His father hadn't talked about it, though Thomas was not so stupid, even in his mid-teens, that you couldn't talk to him about a book. So if Father hadn't talked about his book on the Holy Trinity it was because he was scared of exposing his ideas to his son's skepticism. Or maybe he didn't want to push this lukewarm lad into a position where he would have to declare himself. Either way, they hadn't spoken about it. They hadn't spoken about anything. Then suddenly this mad wave of enthusiasm was flowing through the church; there was talk of healing and the spiritual power to transform the world. Frustrated, Thomas's father had gone for it.

To prove the worth of a weapon you must use it. For six months, a year, the tension in the family soared. They all became more and more themselves. Violently, dangerously themselves. His father prayed and prophesied. His sister was a shrill echo. His brother made fun, hissing and sniggering like a demon. His mother wept; this unkindness would bring her down with gray hairs to her grave. In response, Thomas was intensely well behaved. He hid in his good behavior. In his room, he hung posters of football teams and tinkered with old valve radios. If he could have become invisible, he would. From downstairs came the sound of his sister banging out "Onward, Christian Soldiers" on the piano. Very soon, things would come to a head.

In his small flat, Thomas had put on the kettle for tea. Now he changed his mind and poured himself a beer. He honestly couldn't recall the details, exactly how or why it had happened, but one evening, in the lounge, around midnight, they exorcised his brother. Thomas was fifteen. His brother had come home late. Perhaps smelling of dope or drink. From his bedroom, Thomas heard shouting and started to go downstairs. The lounge door was closed. A pale-green door. From behind it came shouts and the chants of prayers, the piano, a hymn. "Yes, Lord, yes!" And his brother was shouting, too. "Leave me alone! Get your hands off me! Let me go! You're all fucking crazy!"

Thomas stood on the stairs, looking at the pale-green paint on the door, listening. His whole family was in there. His father, his mother, his sister, his

brother. The curate, too, by the sound of it. The loathsome curate with his ecstatic babble. They were all there, behind that door in that room, where a real drama was taking place. The drama between people who are hot and people who are cold.

Thomas was outside.

Thomas had not rushed down the last steps, burst into the room, and yelled at them to stop this nonsense.

Thomas was young. He was afraid. He was excluded. He was not really on anyone's side. He didn't want to be like his parents, but he didn't like the way his brother provoked them. Because thou art lukewarm I will spue thee out of my mouth.

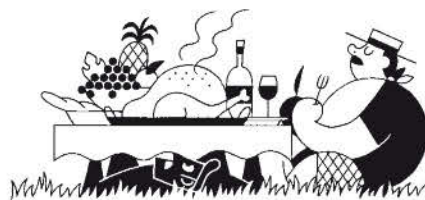
Was this, Thomas wondered, why he was on his own now, forty and more years later, on a Saturday night, bivouacked on a metaphorical mountain-side, with no one beside him? Because he was lukewarm? And if it was, was it really a problem? Thomas rather liked his apartment, didn't he, and his quiet cold evenings.

When the exorcism had failed, when Thomas's brother wasn't purged or broken but continued to be who he had always been, when the desired transformation did *not* take place and life returned, if not to normal, then certainly to monotony and flatness, as when a flood withdraws after the tempest, what had his father's life been like then? How had he been able to go on, to traverse day by day the grim domestic mudscape that was left? The nine sad mothballed years before the cancer choked him?

A year after the exorcism, Thomas had gone on a last holiday with his parents, to Deal, on the south coast. This was where his father and mother had spent their honeymoon. They even got the same room in the same hotel, right on the seafront. But there wasn't much joy now. Thomas felt too old to holiday with his parents. His brother and sister were elsewhere. His parents seemed deflated, directionless, particularly his mother. They were going through the motions. They were trying to revive something. Father gritted his teeth. He suggested that he and Thomas rise early and take a swim before breakfast. It would be bracing. Thomas would have preferred to sleep late but didn't want to disappoint.

So they got up at seven, put on their swimming trunks, crossed the road to the sea, laid their towels on the pebbles, and waded in. The days it rained, they put the towels in plastic bags. The sea was gray. Thomas could still see his father's body, birdlike but paunchy. His skin was dead white, his old red trunks baggy and slack. When the waves came up to his thighs, he would stop for a while, moving his hands back and forth in the cold water, crouching a little after a wave passed to keep his wrists covered, standing on tiptoe when the next wave rose to keep it off his crotch. "Wonderful air," he shouted to Thomas. "So fresh." He made a theatre of puffing out his chest and breathing deeply, and when finally he ducked his head into the water he would come up sputtering and protesting and flapping his arms. It was the theatre of someone trying to turn grayness into fun, trying to find a reason to rejoice. Thomas was aware now that he hadn't been much help to his father. He'd launched into the first big wave and swum steadily out to sea. When he'd stopped and turned, treading water, the Reverend Sanders had been a small bald figure in a vast expanse of gray.

The years after that yielded nothing. Father started using aftershave and wearing colored shirts, even silk cravats. He looked quite the dandy. For Christmas, one gave him bath salts or body lotion. After lunch, he snoozed in an armchair, his trousers loosened. At dinner, he was as impatient as ever. He scraped



the custard off his plate and hurried off to his sermons. That was the one time when he really came alive: preaching, persuading, seducing even, in his robes, from the pulpit. To Thomas's brother, years on, Father had apologized. So his brother said. An awkward, hurried apology about the "too much religion we drummed into you." And once, when Thomas came home late and was in the kitchen drinking coffee, his father had come down to pick at beef bones in the

fridge and, with his mouth full, muttered, "I suppose it has been all right, in the end, this monogamous life." Had that been an invitation to talk?

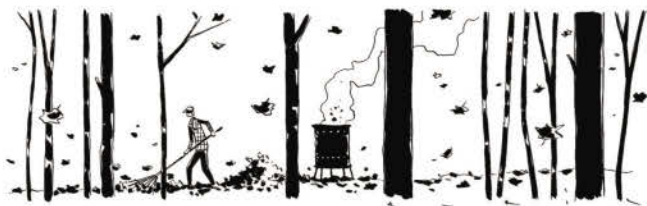
Thomas drank another beer and emptied a pack of nuts into a dish. He closed the document on his computer screen. What sort of life could his father have lived if he had openly declared that he no longer believed, no longer wanted to preach, no longer wanted his marriage? It was unthinkable. Mother would have been destroyed. His sister, and perhaps his brother, too, in a way. Thomas went back in his mind to those morning swims at Deal. Now that he thought about it, there had been a kind of melancholy father-and-son intimacy about them. He remembered the pebbles dark with dew, their slippery hardness when he took his plastic sandals off a couple of yards from the water. Dad put his glasses in his sandals, so as to be sure where they were. "What can you see without them?" Thomas asked. "The sea," Father said, laughing. "The sky." After a warm bed, the water was icy about your ankles. The breeze was chill. The pebbles were painful underfoot. Father began his spluttering routine, then his slow, blind breaststroke. Thomas put his head down and dived. He swam strongly out toward the dark horizon. Stroke after stroke. A powerful freestyle. He was showing off, of course, declaring the vigor and victory of youth. At the same time, it had been a pleasure to have his father there, in the water behind him, between him and the shore. He had felt protected somehow. He remembered that.

Now Thomas has swum out too far, and he stops and turns. He treads water, looking back at England's coast, the long sweep of quaint, decaying façades, the pale clouds. The sea is all around, a slow gray swell. Dimly, he hears his father's voice. "Tommy! Tommy!" Where is he? There. A wave rises and his father's head with it. A small white dot. I can see him, Thomas thinks, but with his poor eyesight he can't see me. "Tommy! Hey, Tommee!" He's worried for me, Thomas realizes. He's worried that I've gone too far and may never make it back. ♦

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Tim Parks on "Reverend."

THE CRITICS



POP MUSIC

THE WAY OF THE WU

The Wu-Tang Clan's career mirrors the kung-fu movies its members grew up on.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

The most surprising thing about “A Better Tomorrow,” the latest album from New York’s Wu-Tang Clan, is not that it is generally strong but that the fractious nine-person group ended up making any kind of recording together at all. For its previous studio album, “8 Diagrams” (2007), Wu-Tang Clan ended up touring without its founder, the RZA, who had produced most of the album. RZA, meanwhile, conducted a solo tour of his own, at the same time. By doing more visible work, including writing soundtracks for Quentin Tarantino, RZA had alienated his own group. As he told me, referring to Raekwon, a core member of the clan, “He said I was a hip-hop hippie with a guitar.” Hippie tag aside, this isn’t unfair. RZA said that he wrote many of the tracks for “A Better Tomorrow” on guitar, first, later voicing the compositions with samples or other instruments. But the Wu still mostly sounds like the Wu, and a newcomer who has never encountered the most famous band from Staten Island would do fine to start here.

The Wu-Tang Clan’s long career mirrors the comic books and kung-fu flicks that its members grew up loving: colorful and intense, and longer on respect than on widespread mainstream acceptance. Like cheap Canal Street mixtapes and kung-fu DVDs, Wu-Tang has never had enormous commercial success, even at the height of the CD era. In twenty years and five albums, the group has sold only a little more than six million rec-

ords, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

Wu-Tang was formed in and around Staten Island’s public Stapleton and Park Hill Houses, in the late eighties, pulling in additional rappers who lived in Brooklyn. By 1992, a member named GZA had released an album, under the name the Genius, on Cold Chillin’ Records, and his cousin, the eventual bandleader RZA, had released a goofy single on Tommy Boy, as Prince Rakeem. But, in the early nineties, RZA plotted a new direction that drew on martial-arts epigrams (“Wu-Tang was the best sword style. And with us, our tongue is our sword,” he explains in “The Wu-Tang Manual”), chess strategy, and practices derived from the teachings of the Five Percent Nation, a group formed in 1963 by Clarence (13X) Smith, a student minister at the Nation of Islam’s Temple Number Seven, in Harlem.

The band’s debut, “Enter the Wu-Tang: 36 Chambers,” in 1993, fell into a category of hip-hop that has since been called “boom bap”: slow, aggressive drum samples matched with lyrical dexterity. But nothing was quite like Wu-Tang records. RZA’s production was dirtier and weirder than that of his peers, and he was teamed with an uncannily talented array of m.c.s with divergent styles. No other band has had such a combination of that dodgy cultural concept known as street cred—all its members are from rough neighborhoods, and most are veterans of jail stints—and unapologetically twisty, emotional, poetic writing. Wu-Tang Clan al-

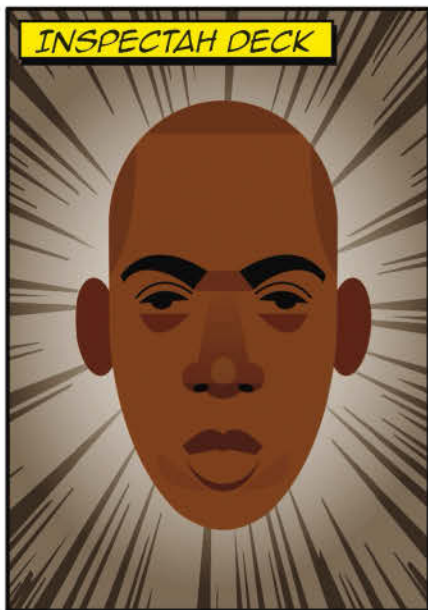
bums feel overloaded in every sense. Other groups, like Public Enemy, had complex, advanced aesthetics, but Wu-Tang Clan was the only one that could switch from discussing Eastern philosophy to telling stories about police harassment to debating the merits of different coats.

Around the same time as Wu-Tang’s debut, smoother sounds from the West Coast and the South took over the charts, and haven’t let go. But the Wu-Tang influence is now being heard in a new generation, with m.c.s like Action Bronson and Joey Bada\$\$, who are heavy on aggression and intricate wordplay, and uninterested in simple, chanted hooks.

There’s no pretending that this is the same collection of rappers who entered the public consciousness with a thundering chain of threats and compressed drums, on the single “Protect Ya Neck.” “A Better Tomorrow” ventures into slightly obvious inspirational talk (“Never let go of your mind, it is a terrible thing to waste, to lose, but it’s very hard to find,” GZA raps, on “Never Let Go”); what sounds like an unironic sample of “Feelings,” on “Felt”; and, on “Miracle,” an invocation of familiar modern rock that has an unmiraculous effect. For most of the album, though, the band is typically prolix, haughty, and immersed in its own world of slang. There are live drums and other traces of RZA’s work as an m.c. and a producer outside hip-hop, with acts such as the Black Keys and James Blake, but nothing that will make you question whom you’re hearing. Indeed, the drum samples in the song “Pioneer the Frontier” were also used in “Enter the Wu-Tang: 36 Chambers.”

There are snippets from kung-fu movies scattered throughout the album, a device that was RZA’s initial watermark as a producer. And although the group has been more flux than stasis in its career, every m.c. is as strong as he was twenty years ago. On “Mistaken Identity,” over a live band playing vaguely sinister funk, Method Man starts off a rattling sixteen-bar verse with an open acknowledgment of who’s on the playing field now: “Whoever push me like Pusha T, I push back. I push your cap, before ninety-three, I pushed crack. I’m hood, black, you know me well, what’s good,

No other hip-hop group has had such a combination of the dodgy concept called street cred and unapologetically poetic, emotional writing.



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CONDÉ NAST

scrap? I'm smoking rappers, you are a L—what's good, Smack?" Pusha T is the well-known rapper who has worked with Kanye West, while Smack White is an underground battle rapper.

"Crushed Egos" begins with a sample of a man saying, "You practiced twenty years? You must be extremely good, then." And he is: Raekwon enters with a verse that sticks to his tradition of folding together phonemes and slang that sound better for lining up askew. He raps, "Restaurants with skeleton keys is big business. Well groomed and elegant, posture's real dapper. Status is gigantic, coats is alpaca." The verse reminds us that the solo albums of many of Wu-Tang's members are stronger than some of the group efforts. Raekwon's "Only Built 4 Cuban Linx . . ." (1995) is possibly the most complex of all the Wu albums. GZA's "Liquid Swords" (1995) is the most coherent and fluid. Ghostface Killah's "Supreme Clientele" (2000) is the most fun and unhinged.

And then there's the work of the m.c. whom Raekwon shouts out as Ason Unique, one of the names used by Ol' Dirty Bastard, the band's only casualty—he died in 2004. The rapper struggled with many antagonists, including the police, drugs, and himself. A new book called "The Dirty Version," written by his constant companion, Buddha Monk, describes the continual state of tumult the rapper lived in, doling out money to friends and lovers and relatives, going AWOL for recording sessions, and generally not accepting that he was possibly the best-known Wu-Tang member. There have been few unexpected appearances as lovely as Dirty's verse on Mariah Carey's "Fantasy," which created a bridge between unchecked lunacy and show-room optimism that nobody has been able to cross since.

There is none of Dirty's mania or gurgling on "A Better Tomorrow," which is a bit defanged. That makes it a perfect primer; there are dozens of albums featuring this producer and these rappers, perhaps the richest catalogue of any single group in rap. The collective is responsible for more than forty albums, probably half of which are worth owning. That's a pretty good average for a deeply disorganized bunch of people. If "A Better Tomorrow" does anything for you, go straight to yesterday. ♦

FLY AWAY

Triangles and treachery in Samantha Harvey's new novel.

BY JAMES WOOD



The odds are powerfully stacked against Samantha Harvey's third novel, "Dear Thief" (Atavist): sometimes you feel that the author has enjoyed building a trembling wall of them. Her novel takes the form of a long letter, written by a woman in middle age, to her childhood friend, and so most of the narration languishes in the corridor of the second-person singular. The friend (the "thief" of the book's title) disappeared a decade and a half ago, and so the narrator does much reminiscing, with the danger that the novel drifts fairly often into the pressureless zones of retrospect. And the narrator's lost friend was a "character," a large person-

ality remembered, with loathing and love, for her enigmatic singularity: so, most perilously, Harvey's novel must work to convince us that this vague "you" of the narrator's letter deserves her extravagant reputation and the time spent recalling her. The book is sometimes precious or whimsical, and can be frustratingly diaphanous. It has nerves of silk; it could probably do with more robustness, and a bit of comedy.

But "Dear Thief" is a beautiful, tentative success, a novel with no interest in conformity. Harvey's book is propelled not by the usual structures of novel writing but by the quality of its author's mind, by the luminousness of her prose,

and by an ardent innocence of speculation that is rare in contemporary fiction. We follow Harvey's narrator, as she pushes her way through her novel-size letter, because we can see that she has somewhere to go, and because we sense that she is trying to figure out exact answers to wide questions. It is a strange and exhilarating journey, unlike anything I have recently encountered.

You can get an idea of the novel's rich peculiarity from its first sentence, which will strike some readers as fey or arch, but which its narrator (who remains nameless) offers quite matter-of-factly: "In answer to a question you asked a long time ago, I have, yes, seen through what you called the gauze of this life." The narrator replies to her old friend's remembered question by telling us about the night her grandmother died, during the long, hot English summer of 1976, when the narrator was twenty-four. Within a paragraph or two, the reader senses an attentive purity in the narrator's prose. She seems alert to everything: the "feathered breaths" of her grandmother, how her "exhales were smooth and liquid, which seems to me now the surest sign of a life's exit—when the act of giving away air is easier than that of accepting it"; the way the dying woman's skin has "flattened a tone—and I mean it this way, like a piece of music gone off-key." The scene and the location are somewhat magical. The grandmother's house is by the Thames, very east in the city, near the Isle of Dogs, and not far from the point at which the river, wide now, becomes the sea—"a thousand pale horses frothing at the bit."

To pass the time, the narrator wanders down to the river, where she finds a collection of bones on the shore; when she returns, she discovers, as she expected to, that her grandmother has died, and feels this end to be calm and right. She suffers no grief, because "life as I'd always known it shows itself now as only the negative space made by a much vaster reality." She thinks of her grandmother, "fundamental and as still as a root," and it seems senseless to say that she is dead, "just as senseless as it is to say I myself am alive." In this respect, the narrator says, she has seen through the gauze of this life.

It's a risky way to begin a novel, to throw us head first into death and sententiousness, metaphysics and nameless characters (the grandmother has no

Harvey, in excavating a love triangle, explores the strange elasticity of time.

further role in the book). But Harvey's novel proceeds in this spirit of continual lawlessness. The "gauze of this life" is just the kind of phrase, we learn, that the narrator's friend would use—challenging, glamorously pretentious, annoying, at once acute and vague. The two women grew up together in the English countryside, in Shropshire. The narrator's friend is named Nina, though she is here nicknamed Butterfly, because, one supposes, she is lovely, and comes and goes in apparently random flights.

Butterfly is one of those people whose role on earth is to be talked about. As the narrator gradually reveals, her strange friend stood out in the England of their nineteen-sixties childhood ("this mannered land that was too small for you"): a Jewish immigrant from Lithuania who was brought to England as a baby; an androgynous beauty, with a strong nose and narrow hips; languorous, dangerous, self-absorbed, brilliant, mystical (she liked quoting from the Upanishads). When she was younger, Butterfly showed little interest in men, and would respond to their overtures with a placid "Thank you, no," and the lighting of a cigarette. When they mocked her and called her a "dyke," she would dumbfoundingly quote Lorca at them: "Poetry was your only response to anything they did or said and you used it as wastefully as somebody emptying a cartridge into grey sky. The

poems would leave indents of silence, like hammer marks on metal." She had an air of "magnificent poverty." She "looked out of place almost anywhere substantial." She was mercurial. One day, she might seem pale and plain, "and we leave you alone in the veil of smoke that makes you look like a sullen bride, bored at her own wedding table." On another, she has painted her eyelids purple or orange, or is wearing a man's purple trousers. For her twenty-first birthday, she was given a cream-colored shawl, and seems not to have taken it off for the next decade. When the narrator last saw her friend, in 1986, she was still wearing it, but it was dirty and torn in one place, so that the white of Butterfly's shoulder came through, "like some fallen rampart," betraying "a loss of dignity far greater than if you had stood naked in public."

People who get talked about, who are remembered as "figures," tend to be memorable either for some large achievement or for scandalously doing nothing very much—for just *being*. Butterfly falls into the second category, and Harvey, again setting herself a difficult task, skillfully captures the friend's enraging passivity. Was she selfish? No, the narrator says; she might have been fundamentally selfless, "by which I mean somebody who lies low like a card in a pack, until the cards are dealt." There are cards that are good news and cards that

are bad news, but Butterfly was neither intrinsically good nor bad. "She is just offered up, and played or not."

It is this terrible "neutrality" to which the narrator returns again and again, and which provides the novel's catalyst. The narrator, who is around fifty and is writing this letter in 2001 and 2002, remembers a woman who could never quite be grasped—she would disappear and emerge years later, and give no coherent account of where she had been. She left England, or so it appears, in 1973, when she was twenty-one, and turned up at the narrator's house nine years later, asking if she could stay for a month or two. The narrator was now living with a husband, Nicolas, and a young son, Teddy. (After a spell in London, they had moved back to the countryside that she grew up in.) They take Butterfly in, of course, and she stays for three years.

Butterfly's failure to explain or apologize is characteristic. Less expected, perhaps, are the needle marks on her arm. Butterfly has become a committed, if discreetly functional, drug-taker. And something else happens during her three-year visit, something Harvey has been slyly preparing, with various hints, a vague sense of unease, and the slow revelation of the narrator's possessive anger. Butterfly worms her way into her friend's marriage and breaks it up. The passive-aggressive insinuation culminates in a scene in Spain, when the narrator catches her friend and her husband having sex, a rare moment of narrative conventionality in the book (which is not necessarily the weaker for it). Earlier, less conventionally, in a passage of subtle indirection, the narrator first realized what was afoot. Butterfly is walking with her friend; she is wearing Nicolas's cast-off trousers, and the narrator is surprised by how well they fit her. Always ready with an opinion, Butterfly announces, in her airy and pretentious way, that religions have trinities because "a triangle is the holiest and most elegant of things; with two lines you can only create two lines, but with three you can create a shape. That is why three is a transformative number." It is the moment when the narrator, always weirdly tolerant of her friend, first feels threatened and outmaneuvered: "You were going to work your way into my marriage and you were going to call its new three-way shape *holy*, and I, pinned like a snared bird to one corner of a triangle, would have to watch it



"Think of it as one less thing to worry about."

happen.” (Harvey has said that her novel is indebted to Leonard Cohen’s song “Famous Blue Raincoat,” also about a love triangle, and also written as a letter to the person responsible for the marital destruction.)

This breakage is at the heart of the book, and explains not only the narrator’s obsessive involvement in her lost friend but also, perhaps, Butterfly’s long disappearance. Yet Harvey is less interested in the dramatic formula of betrayal than in making use of the novel’s essayistic form to range widely, sometimes concretely, sometimes abstractly. She has been compared to Virginia Woolf, but I was at moments reminded of Marilynne Robinson, particularly of the near-pedagogical or sermonizing rhetoric of “Housekeeping.” Harvey, who was born in Kent in 1975, has a degree in philosophy, and you sense a continuous pressure of intellectual inquiry, in sentences that are rich but always lucid. As in her exquisite first novel, “The Wilderness” (2009), which is narrated by a man who is suffering from Alzheimer’s, Harvey explores the strange elasticity of time, and our relation to it: how we might carelessly let years go by without self-assertion or resistance; how we wantonly reshape the past; how we live too much in the past (and yet never enough to satisfy us, because it has so painfully gone). The narrator is fascinated by Butterfly’s canny passivity, but she is also bewildered by her own. Once she saw what was coming, why did she do nothing to stop it? Was it because she was foolishly tolerant, or because she knew that she was witnessing her friend’s steady downfall? (Wherever Butterfly now is, she is not there with Nicolas: the two were barely together as lovers.) And what of her own downfall—why did she acquiesce in that, colluding in her own loneliness? (She has been separated from Nicolas for fifteen years, and doesn’t appear to see a great deal of her grownup son.) The narrator now works in a nursing home, which forces her to reflect on the shape a life takes, on everything that is evidently beyond our control. She doesn’t understand time, she insists, which is to say that she doesn’t really understand life:

You would think that living is a kind of scholarship in time, and that the longer we live the more expert we become at coping

with it, in the way that, if you play tennis enough, you get used to coping with faster and faster serves. Instead I find that the longer I live the more bemused I become, and the more impenetrable the subject shows itself to be. I sit on a heap of days.

Sitting on her heap of days (a wonderfully Biblical image), she goes back in time, she recollects, and, in a striking inversion of the usual wisdom, phrased with Harvey’s wistful elegance, she posits that the past is where our true potential lies:

There is freedom there; there is always freedom in the past. The self you left behind lives in endless possibility. The older you get, the bigger and wilder the past becomes, a place that can never again be tended and which is therefore prone to that loveliness that happens on wastelands and wildernesses, where grass has grown over scrap metal and wheat has sprung up in cracks between concrete and there is no regular shape for the light to fall flat on, so it vaults and multiplies and you want to go there. You want to go there like you want to go to a lover.

This runs the risk of making “Dear Thief” sound more abstract, or just more essayistic, than it is. One of the regular rewards of its prose is its careful attention to the world—from the “reproachful magnetism” between two tango dancers to the way a snowflake lands on a windowpane, “in that ludicrous wet collapse that removes all the mystery.” Harvey exactly sketches a Spanish bullfight—the moment, near the end, when bull and matador recognize each other, and then the moment when that mutual animal recognition is destroyed: “When the bull finally realizes that the man is cruel, there is no longer recognition. The bull is not cruel; why does the man have to be. . . . The bull staggers and drops like a rock into its short shadow, and is dragged away to music.” There is a transporting description of fishing for mussel pearls in the Scottish Highlands: “Often in the Highlands the very early mornings are clear and blue and then become gradually duller as if, I always thought, our human presence clouded the landscape like breath clouds glass.” Harvey’s rarity can be found in that last sentence, in her ability to move from the ordinary to the speculative, her dance to and from the metaphysical. There is steady pleasure and consolation in this for the reader, if not reliably for the book’s troubled characters. Even as it tells its tale of determinism and fatality, this remarkable novel asserts its own curious freedoms. ♦

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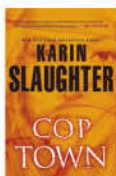


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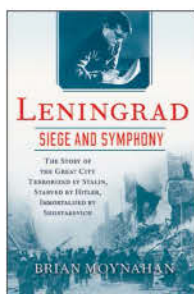
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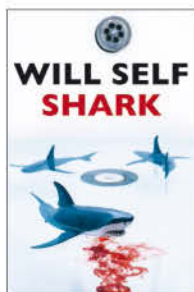
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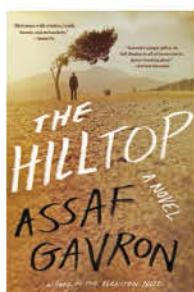
ELSA SCHIAPARELLI, by *Meryle Secrest (Knopf)*. This biography of the fashion designer whose elegant, humorous confections captured the spirit of the nineteen-twenties and thirties emphasizes Schiaparelli's lack of formal training. Born in Rome, she led a peripatetic life as the wife of a madcap occultist before launching herself as a designer. She learned to combine sleek, modern silhouettes with oversized buttons, metallic embroidery, and vibrant colors, like her trademark shocking pink. Collaborations with Surrealists resulted in ingenious creations: a suit with "drawers" for pockets was designed with Dali. Her empire at its height stretched from Paris to Hollywood. It met its end after the war, when a chastened generation took refuge in softer, safer looks.



LENINGRAD, by *Brian Moynahan (Atlantic Monthly)*. Moynahan tells the story of the siege of Leningrad through Dmitri Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, which was mostly written in, and is dedicated to, the city. The account begins pre-siege: the secret police had taken so many people away, the poet Anna Akhmatova wrote, that the city "dangled like a useless appendage from its prisons." As war came, Leningrad braced itself. "My weapon was music," Shostakovich declared. Just before finishing the piece, in 1942, he was evacuated to Moscow, but the score was flown back in across German lines. Moynahan's account of the first Leningrad performance is memorable, and his book also provides a perspective on Russia today: Vladimir Putin, whose father was severely wounded during the siege, is "himself an echo from the violent past."



SHARK, by *Will Self (Grove)*. Set in the nineteen-seventies, this novel, the second in a trilogy that began with "Umbrella," centers on a psychiatrist named Zack Busner and an experimental asylum that he operates in suburban London. The thorny plot spreads from an ill-fated LSD trip that Busner takes with his mentally ill patients, including a former naval officer who claims to have been on the Enola Gay when it bombed Hiroshima and a heroin-addicted prostitute. Self writes in a high-modernist, hallucinatory, stream-of-consciousness style, leaping between sentences, time periods, and perspectives. It can be difficult to hang on, but if, like the titular creature, you keep moving through the "verbal bouillabaisse," the reward is a strange, vivid book.



THE HILLTOP, by *Assaf Gavron, translated from the Hebrew by Steven Cohen (Scribner)*. This expansive, humorous novel tackles the politically charged issue of the settlements and their role in Israeli society. Gavron's hilltop is the illegal outpost of Ma'aleh Hermesh C, a fictional hamlet, made up of a few caravans, that borders on a Palestinian village in the West Bank. Its residents—including a religious farmer who sells his produce to "bleeding-heart left-wingers," a doctoral candidate writing about the kibbutz movement as a "Failure-in-Waiting," and a young couple whose marriage is beginning to unravel—are threatened with imminent eviction. Gavron's satiric touches can be coruscating, but the task of encompassing both sarcasm and compassion proves hard.

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ON TELEVISION

THE NEW ABNORMAL

The carnival logic of "American Horror Story."

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



A little culture for the TV viewers. God knows they need it," Madame Elsa, played by Jessica Lange, purrs. A sideshow impresario and a double amputee, Elsa has just finished crooning "September Song" to her lover, Paul the Illustrated Seal—she's rehearsing for her anticipated musical debut on that novelty stage of the nineteen-fifties, the television screen. Handsome as a matinée idol, Paul (Mat Fraser) reclines on an ottoman, his flippers resting beside his tattooed chest.

"American Horror Story" has always been a show dedicated to spectacle, and when I first heard that this season would be set in a freak show in Florida I yelped

out loud. What could be more perfect? Brassy and divinely decadent, "American Horror Story," which was co-created by Ryan Murphy and is now in its fourth season, is one of TV's few truly experimental series—and, like many seedy carnivals, it's been subject to both nervous laughter and progressive criticism. A mashup of sensational genres, from horror to vaudeville, the show has revived the anthology model, with a new setting and a new story each season. A revolving repertory of actors—Lange, Sarah Paulson, Kathy Bates, Denis O'Hare—play different roles each round (and often adopt ever crazier accents). Like many of Murphy's shows (he also created "Glee" and

"Nip/Tuck"), "American Horror Story" doesn't always make sense. Sometimes, as with "Coven," last season's arc, which dealt with witchcraft and slavery, it's downright clumsy about its incendiary themes. But when it shines—as was the case during its most brilliant season, "Asylum"—the show is a true provocation, a scream in both senses, drawing little distinction between a scare, a turn-on, an eye roll, and a giggle. It's a smart show that's never haughty or solemn, with an aesthetic that's reflexively shameless, in the best way, about serious subjects—including, this season, disability.

Andrew Solomon, in his excellent book "Far from the Tree," describes two kinds of identity available to the disabled: "vertical" (the family they're descended from) and "horizontal" (the people with whom they share a physical trait, like dwarfism or deafness). "Freak Show" is about many things—clown phobia, snuff films, David Bowie—but, primarily, it's about horizontal identity, as viewed in a fun-house mirror, distorted by fury and desire. In this theme, it replicates its source material: the classic horror movie "Freaks" (1932), which was about circus performers who take violent revenge on a villainous "normal" woman, Cleopatra, when she exploits a member of their troupe. (If Cleopatra existed in the modern era, the word for her would be "ableist.") The director Tod Browning's pet project (he ran away at sixteen to join the circus himself), the film was a notorious flop, and wrecked its creator's career. The studio demanded that Browning edit out a castration sequence and add a sappy ending; even so, after a test screening the producers were accused of causing a moviegoer's miscarriage. In the nineteen-seventies, "Freaks" became a cult sensation, best known for the chant "Gooble, gobble! One of us, one of us!"

"Freak Show" is an elaborate remix of the original, stamping Browning's iconic characters with Murphy's high-camp image: Cleopatra becomes Lange's Germanic dominatrix, who lost her legs to a chain saw; Michael Chiklis plays a closeted strongman; Kathy Bates is a poignant bearded lady; Angela Bassett is a three-breasted "hermaphrodite"; and Sarah Paulson is the conjoined twins Dot and Bette, who lean in from the sides of the frame like wilted stalks. (They're so frequently filmed as reflec-

This season of the show takes the 1932 movie "Freaks" as an inspiration.

tions in mirrors that, often, they feel like doubles of a double.) We're now two-thirds of the way through the season, and the series continues to offer up variants on the "Freaks" narrative, about a "normal" girl who flirts with a "freak," placing them side by side with more earnest themes, like the hunt for a non-bigoted doctor. Murphy has also folded in his own obsessions: glam-rock musical numbers, homoerotic serial killers, and the toxic effects of Hollywood vanity.

Refreshingly, the season is also genuinely frightening, with at least one truly nightmarish vision per week. It opened with one of the series's dirtiest, weirdest villains yet, a mute clown named Twisty, who kidnapped children; once Twisty was dispatched, up popped a chilling replacement, Dandy, a preening sociopath who styles himself the U.S. Steel of Murder. Dandy became Twisty's assistant, or maybe just his unpaid intern, after he received the clown as an ill-conceived gift from his mother. A spoiled American man-child, Dandy murders as a form of narcissistic tantrum—or perhaps, his mother suggests, as the result of upper-class inbreeding. "Jack the Ripper was a Windsor, for God's sake!" she exclaims.

Like "Freaks," "Freak Show" also mingles able-bodied actors—some wear prosthetics, while others are altered with special effects—with what the marvelously charismatic Mat Fraser terms a "radically different person onstage entertaining with their radical difference." Fraser is a British performance artist, sometimes using the name Seal Boy, who has created shows like the burlesque "Beauty and the Beast" and "Thalidomide!! A Musical." There's also Jyoti Amge, as Ma Petite, a tiny dwarf; the trans actress Erika Ervin, as the giantess Amazon Eve; and Ben Woolf, who has pituitary dwarfism, as Meep, a pinhead. Rose Siggins, who was born with a condition called sacral agenesis, plays Legless Suzi. When the season began, these characters had few lines, which suggested a tricky hierarchy: the real-life Seal Boy was an extra in scenes starring Evan Peters's prosthetically created Human Lobster. But, midway through the season, Murphy began to shift the spotlight, mining these bodies and personalities for warmth, sex, and tragedy. A sequence in which the lovable Ma Petite stands in a large glass jar, fluttering her fingers like a butterfly, became

one of the show's most frightening bits of poetry, like some candied fairy tale from Oscar Wilde.

Not surprisingly, Murphy's approach has triggered complaints of exploitation—and not for the first time. Four of Murphy's shows include characters, and actors, who have Down syndrome. On "Glee," Artie (played by an able-bodied actor) was in a wheelchair. In "Asylum," Chloë Sevigny played a nymphomaniac whose limbs had been amputated. There are many other examples—in fact, there are so many disabled characters in Ryan Murphy's series that it's impossible to judge these portrayals as a class, although it's worth noting that, like Madame Elsa, Murphy is the rare impresario who explores this subject matter at all. Along with the concern that he's a huckster, his shows raise the question of what it means to have stars "crip" or "spack up"—disdainful terms for able-bodied actors playing disabled characters. This debate, among disability advocates, has analogues to similar issues about cross-racial and transgender roles, from Mickey Rooney's notorious "yellow-face," in "Breakfast at Tiffany's," to Jared Leto's turn as a transgender character, in "Dallas Buyers Club." Activists complain that Hollywood stars win Oscars, and score points for "bravery," in roles that could go to a disabled actor. They resent the notion that disability itself is a costume. That's what acting is, of course: it's putting on a new identity. But what makes blackface different from drag, or from adding a flipper?

In Murphy's case, I'm no fan of some of the more sentimental disability plots on "Glee," or of the dirty jokes given to Becky, a cheerleader with Down—gags that felt both queasy and hackish, although no more so than other aspects of the show, in later seasons. Given the rarity of disabled bodies on TV, it can verge on icky (or problematic, to use that awful term of art) to view those few through a fish-eye lens. And while Sarah Paulson is revelatory as the conjoined twins—and I wouldn't want anyone but Lange to play Elsa—I found myself rooting for the "real disabled" to be more than color, or moral coverage, among the able-bodied stars. It was a relief when Fraser was effectively promoted, becoming the heartthrob of a romantic triangle with Elsa and Penny (Grace Gummer), the

candy striper he fell for during an opium-addled orgy.

Still, the related complaint, that the characters are bad role models, misses the point, from my perspective. "Freak Show" embodies the philosophy put forth by Fraser in a promotional video for the series: while do-gooders view the sideshow as nefarious, it was, historically, the one place where people with odd anatomies were glamorized, not hidden away. There they could make money, live independently, and find sex and love. The difference between gawking and gazing, fearing and desiring, is not so simple. Murphy's "freaks"—both the organic and the artificial ones—aren't lessons for the able-bodied, and when the show does veer into pedantry ("You're the real freaks!") it's at its weakest. They're divas and lovers and revengers and martyrs, who get to experience the extremes of human emotion. There are enough of them so that they can't be only one thing. At the show's best moments, they're stars, not props.

"American Horror Story" will never be for every viewer; it is, above all else, rude. In the first season, it was rude about a rapist in a black latex gimp mask. In the second season, it was rude about a lampshade made of breast skin. In the third season, it was so rude that it was incoherent. By rude, I don't mean "politically incorrect," that inane term for celebrating stupid remarks for their honesty. I mean rude in a grander sense: brazen and crude and funky, open to the ugly as well as to the beautiful, with a vision of the body as a source of both suffering and ecstasy. This sort of rudeness derives from the understanding that, some of the time, a demand for politeness is really a demand to be quiet and disappear.

This coarseness gives the show leeway to be, at times, both nasty and funny, making it impossible to distinguish its best from its worst—as in a recent episode in which a "normal" was tattooed, and her tongue forked, against her will, a sequence that felt at once nonsensical and indelible. The series is endlessly, archly quotable: "They said I made men ejaculate gold," Elsa reminisces, of her days as a dominatrix in the Weimar Republic. If it risks going too far, that's an "American Horror Story" tradition, too—it's why we watch through our fingers, squinching our eyes. Why go to the circus if there's no chance of blood? ♦

YOU AND ME BOTH

Poems about power, abasement, and the shared art of loneliness.

BY DAN CHIASSON



The poet Olena Kaltyiak Davis's new book, her third, is "The Poem She Didn't Write and Other Poems." The title echoes, even as it undermines, an old formula that seems to have gone out of favor: Eliot's "The Waste Land and Other Poems," Yeats's "The Green Helmet and Other Poems," Ginsberg's "Howl and Other Poems," Plath's "The Colossus and Other Poems" all come readily to mind, along with many slim but stately volumes before them. These titles conjure a world in which poetry was a game played across the ages, masterpiece versus masterpiece.

The struggle was dynastic; the combatants were male, unless, like Plath, they had internalized (in Plath's case, tragically) the patrilineal rules for advancement. Anthologies were printed and syllabi distributed, and so the canon was formed.

Poets live casually among masterpieces of their art. The volume of Stevens propping up the window, the translation of Catullus serving as a coaster, the waterlogged Dickinson: these are features of any writer's environment, and the thought of joining them both inspires and blocks. And so Davis's submissions to the canon are

anti-submissions; her title poem fantasizes a work that "wasn't / influenced by homer or blake or yeats" and "contained no anxiety" and "hadn't even heard of / louise glück franz wright billy (budd) collins." The poem she didn't write isn't "The Poem She Didn't Write": of that imagined, nonexistent poem, Davis informs us that she "did not read [it] to anyone" and "did not send it out 'for publication.'" That poem preempts its own rejection by never existing in the first place; it is the recessive version of Davis's canonical aspirations, whose namesake will carry its torch.

Davis's professed unworthiness is one of many tricky manifestations of her ambition. She is the rare poet who has made underproduction an aspect of her glamour. Since 1997, she has published only two full-length books and a chapbook, whose contents are reprinted here. The poems can be tawdry, but any art so fixated on its imperfections comes off as weirdly pure. Maybe some of this is geographical. Poets on the usual coasts can keep themselves busy inside the panopticon, never far from a bar reading or a teaching gig. Davis, who was born in 1963, in Detroit, to Ukrainian parents, has for years lived in and around Anchorage, Alaska, where she works as an attorney. From the evidence of her poems, she is a single mother who drives—or once drove—"a 1995 red toyota 4-runner with racing stripe," listens to loud Dylan on the way to pick up her kids, falls in and out of love, and, above all, reads. The poems are paved with outbursts and literary touchstones. They feel like quickies, rough liaisons where "sex meets books," sometimes, as in "Francesca Says More," unhappily:

that maiden thump *was* book on floor,
but
does it really matter who kissed who
first or then who decided to go further?
lower? faster? naturally, we took
turns on top. *now here, now there, and*
up
and down... once it started no one
even thought to think to stop.
so, we have holes inside our souls,
but mustn't we begin by filling others'?
god gave us lips and hands and parts
that cannot possibly be saved for prayer.
nor by.
i will not name name, claim fame by how
well

Olena Kaltyiak Davis writes poetry that can be at once tawdry and oddly pure.

ILLUSTRATION BY PATRICK MORGAN

or who i fucked or why, it happens all the time.
and it's you, white pilgrim, whom next
galehot seeks.

fuck. we didn't read again for weeks.

The speaker is a contemporary version of Dante's tragic heroine Francesca, condemned to suffer in Hell with her lover, Paolo. The form—a form that Dante helped to invent—is the sonnet, here reduced to its rudiments: fourteen lines, a rumor of pentameter, a tart couplet at the close. The poem, one of Davis's many “shattered sonnets,” as she has called them, draws these lines in order to color outside of them; her small “i” isn't so much an homage to Cummings as it is a nod to text messages and Gchat, forms of written communication that operate under the conditions of instantaneousness previously reserved for speech. It was reading about the romance of Lancelot and Guinevere, as Dante tells us, that got Francesca in trouble to begin with; it was reading Francesca's story about the dangers of reading that resulted in the book's “maiden thump” as it was unceremoniously kicked off the bed and replaced by the book Davis wrote.

“The Poem She Didn't Write” is a breakup book, full of the kinds of invective and taunts honed by a person who has spent, as all of us have now spent, infinite hours online. Its complex tones arise from the poet's wanting equally to seduce and to repel a lover whose deepening silence only provokes rhetorical escalation. The effect can be like reading e-mails in someone's drafts folder—but who wouldn't want to read Davis's drafts? “Do you know how many men would paykilldie / for me to suck their cock? *fuck*,” she writes, leaving the triple verb just as it is, as though waiting for the finished missive to make the choice.

Power, especially sexual power; the pleasures and risks of debasement; candor and the fakery that passes for it; wildness and the social vacuum it shatters—these are Davis's preoccupations. Sex displaces reading, kicking the book off the bed. But, just as often, reading, by providing one kinky sce-

nario after another, displaces sex, as in “Robert Lowell”:

The dream, I don't remember how it
went,
For I don't really dream or count or
know
Why Robert Lowell: the only poet shade
sent
To acknowledge my cool ambition, light
my cigarette.

The poem seems angled for stateliness, with its regular meters and debonair rhymes. Lowell, who more or less invented confessional poetry, is, of course, the very model of male charisma and its excesses. But things rapidly, thrillingly unravel. In the next stanza, Davis is a sexy shambles, her T-shirt emblazoned with a phrase from Lowell's late poem “Epilogue”:

This is the decade of aughts and oughts
And I am still naught. I am forty. In a
tight
T-shirt over my small ignoble breasts
reading:
“ALL'S MISALLIANCE.”

Lowell's patents are everywhere (“These are the tranquilized *fifties* / and I am forty,” he writes, in “Memories of West Street and Lepke”), though Davis's adaptations gut and rebuild them: a woman who is “forty” in the two-thousands is “naught” in the decade of “aughts and oughts.” The poem drifts from its altitudes down into the scuffed, actual life it briefly sought to transcend.

What makes Davis's work exciting is the feeling it conveys of being “full-famished. / Famished-full,” an emotional state with aesthetic ramifications: it sends us ricocheting from line to line and poem to poem looking for sustenance. Here's reason to think that authentic pining in poetry, though hard to come by, is probably necessary for any poet who wishes to become classic. Davis's successive impulses, often cancelling one another, imply a poem full of fresh starts summarily abandoned, as in “The Lyric 'I' Drives to Pick Up Her Children from School: A Poem in the Postconfessional Mode.” The title mocks the language of M.L.A. panels and doctoral theses: if this “lyric 'I'” is, as the theory heads say, a construct, a fiction, what's it doing wearing “her tight jeans, her big boots, her puffy parka”?

“i” feels the power of being a single mom in a red truck.
“i” knows it is not enough power.
“i” thinks “i am the man, i suffered, i was there”.
“i” is almost broke, but
“i” thinks “i live more in a continuous present that i enjoy”.
“i” thinks “amor fati”.
“i” notices the chugach mountains.
“i” notices the chugach mountains sometimes look good and sometimes bad.
“i” remembers that yesterday the chugach mountains looked desolate and dirty and roadblocky.
“i” notices the chugach mountains look particularly beautiful today covered in sun and snow.
“i” almost thinks “bathed in sun and snow” but stops herself.
“i” feels that “i” can maybe find, really start, really finish her sex poem tomorrow.

When you say these lines aloud, you become the “I,” just as Davis, repeating Whitman's lines, becomes “the man” who can say “I suffered, I was there”; and yet you also experience the jolt of disagreement between subject and verb, since “I” is here treated as third person. The effect is more like being an actor in a play, moved by the gusts of emotion that move your character, than like being a member of the audience. This discomfiting proximity, this unsought intimacy, is the fundamental pleasure of poetry. Davis's poems plunge us right into the heart of it.

The medium of poetry isn't language, really; it's human loneliness, a loneliness that poets, having received it themselves from earlier poets, transfer to their readers. Like bees in a honeycomb, writers and readers experience isolation and solitude communally and collaboratively. This is what Harold Bloom speaks of when, in a remark that Davis quotes, he says that poets create an “otherness” such that loneliness is “created and alleviated at once.” Writing a poem, you create that vivid otherness; reading one, you re-create it in your own person. These two lonely souls, writer and reader, are bound to one another. They can be miles or centuries apart, but in Davis's book the passage between them sees some heavy traffic. Her final poem, a single couplet called “Threshold,” invites us to cross it: “what i should of softly sweetly surely said: / ‘o wingèd boy, come read with me in bed.’” ♦

THE OUTSIDERS

"Wild" and "Mr. Turner."

BY DAVID DENBY



Reese Witherspoon stars in *"Wild,"* adapted from the book by Cheryl Strayed.

Wild opens with a shot of majestic forested mountains and the sound of a woman breathing harder and harder, as if in sexual excitement. The woman, however, turns out to be a hiker, Cheryl Strayed (Reese Witherspoon), with a huge pack on her back, laboring to reach an exposed high place. When she gets there, she takes off her too-small boots, to reveal blackened toenails that are painfully loose. One of the boots falls into a canyon, and, with a curse, she throws the other after it. *"Wild"* is based on Strayed's autobiographical best-seller, published in 2012, seventeen years after her arduous trek, which she reconstructed in punishing and exhilarating detail. Her mother died in 1991, and Strayed, grief-stricken and lost, cheated on her devoted husband (played by Thomas Sadoski in the film), and, with one lover, fell into a heroin haze. In 1995, she walked eleven hundred miles, through desert, bush, and snowy mountains, from Mojave, California, to the Oregon-Washington border. Each stopping place in the wilderness is a kind of marker along the road to redemption. Sweating and freezing, Cheryl

wants to expunge loss and self-disgust from her soul. The suggestion of sex at the start is part of the movie's candid tone. One of the things that make Cheryl more complicated and compelling than the heroine of *"Tracks"* (this year's earlier woman-schlepping-across-the-desert movie) is that, along the trail, she experiences every encounter with men as fraught with erotic possibility—or trepidation. (She has one happy meeting with a sinewy young man played by the Dutch actor Michiel Huisman.) *"Wild"* is about the renewal of self, but it's a film made without sanctimony or piety.

The English screenwriter and novelist Nick Hornby (*"About a Boy"*) adapted the book for the movie, which was directed by the French-Canadian Jean-Marc Vallée (*"Dallas Buyers Club"*). Both men know that narrative art lives in small details woven through large emotions. Cheryl's throwing the second shoe over the side suggests defiance and a willingness to endure pain and humiliation. (She makes shoes out of sandals and duct tape, which produce blister upon blister.) Vallée focusses on the hiker's obsession

with the profound materiality of her existence—not just heat, rain, cold, snakes, and tiny crawling creatures but the complicated paraphernalia of food, water, stove, tent, animal-scaring whistle, and whatnot, all of which has to be packed and unpacked daily. Inexperienced Cheryl is as overloaded as a nineteenth-century American grand tourist embarking for Europe with too many steamer trunks.

In photographs, Cheryl Strayed looks like a big-bodied woman, but Reese Witherspoon stands barely more than five feet, and when she first tries to pull on her monster pack it forces her to the ground. (The pack becomes something like a malevolent object in a Chaplin comedy.) Witherspoon doesn't have the muscular legs of a hiker, but she has a determined set to her jaw. From the beginning, with her startling performance as a ruthless high-school girl in *"Election"* (1999), she has played unstoppable young women. Her pink-candy-box period—the two *"Legally Blonde"* movies—turned her all-conquering will into a profitable joke. But she has dropped that sort of calculation and, in addition to acting, become a formidable producer (she's part of the team that made *"Gone Girl"*). Here she's a good actress playing an intelligent, well-read, ambitious, but screwed-up woman.

Strayed is enmeshed in literature, and her skillfully structured adventure tale is more expressive than the film. She keeps a journal, and the entries, as well as chance encounters, set off memories in the movie of her extraordinary mother (Laura Dern), her husband, and various other men. The memories flash by in mostly short scenes—sometimes a montage of single shots—and the device, which tries to keep us inside Cheryl's head, becomes tiresome and far less satisfying than Strayed's more sustained written recollections. The scenery, of course, could stop the heart of a mountain goat, and *"Wild"* has an admirable heroine, but the movie itself often feels literal-minded rather than poetic, busy rather than sublime, eager to communicate rather than easily splendid.

Watching Timothy Spall's performance as the finest of British painters, in Mike Leigh's *"Mr. Turner"* (opening December 19th), you can't help but think that Dickens, in his

many portraits of exuberant Englishmen, wasn't exaggerating. All the men in "Mr. Turner" bluster at one another, as if they were playing themselves on-stage, but Spall outdoes everyone in heroic oddity and temper. The movie begins in 1826, when J. M. W. Turner, then fifty-one, is a famous man living a largely anonymous life. Sketchbook in hand, he walks alone and undisturbed along cliffs facing the sea, or in the Kentish port town of Margate, or in Holland, on a bluff, staring at the sun on the horizon. Spall has a small mouth that pulls up toward a shapeless nose, and eyes that are set close together, like those of a furtive animal. It's a face that repels examination; his Turner wants to see, not be seen—or heard. When he speaks, indistinct syllables emerge from his throat—a half-dozen varieties of grunt, snarl, and roar. Spall has played angry men before, but, except for a brief appearance as Churchill, in "The King's Speech," he hasn't played angry great men. Beneath the snarling, hooded temperament, intellectual curiosity and a wide range of sympathies seethe and, occasionally, breach the surface. "Mr. Turner" is a harsh, strange, but stirring movie, no more a conventional artist's bio-pic than Robert Altman's wonderful, little-seen film about van Gogh and his brother, "Vincent and Theo."

Like many such persons, Turner has an overwhelming desire to do exactly as he pleases. In his handsome but underdressed London house, he lives with his loving father and an adoring servant, whom he uses sexually, giving her not so much as a glance. Returning from a journey, he rushes to his studio

in a back room and immediately sets to work. He sleeps in his clothes, makes art all day, wherever he is, and enjoys few pleasures. The bohemian scene doesn't exist for him. He has no special milieu except for a few aristocratic country houses, where he's an honored guest, and the Royal Academy, in London. He strides through its marble halls in a top hat, frock coat, and cravat, and challenges the other artists, including John Constable, with muttered remarks and such astonishing acts as disfiguring one of his own maritime paintings with a smudge of crimson. After disappearing for a while, he returns and wipes away half the wet paint, leaving a bobbing buoy. He later attacks a canvas like a proto Action painter. He stabs it with a brush, spits on it, and speckles it with handfuls of powdery substances. His top hat affords him the reputation of a gentleman, disguising sheer aggression with respectability. But Mr. Turner is no gentleman.

Mike Leigh, whose "Topsy-Turvy" (1999) was an acridly entertaining portrait of Arthur Sullivan and W. S. Gilbert, never softens or explains. His people brush rudely past one another. The movie details, for instance, Turner's encounters with the impecunious painter Benjamin Haydon, whose large historical canvases were no longer in fashion (or very good, according to Dickens). Haydon comes off as a self-dramatizing hothead—no gentleman, either, and, worse, unlike Turner, he can't fake composure when necessary. Leigh features him, I think, in order to remind us that not all pos-

sessed artists possess genius. A resilient but tough-minded attitude toward life and art rules the movie. Many of the people we see seem to be ill, and the death of children is a constant. Against this early-Victorian gloom, Turner, a modern sun god, floods his canvases with light. Obsessed with the meeting of land and sea, he suffuses everything with an effulgence of white, yellow, and ochre, and blurs the outlines of solid objects with a squiggly brush and a rag, anticipating the work of the Impressionists. Leigh and the cinematographer, Dick Pope, show people looking at the paintings more than they show the paintings themselves, which was wise—the work doesn't reproduce well onscreen. What the filmmakers can do, however, is re-create, with hard clarity, what it was that Turner saw. They appear to be saying, "This is our way of looking. Photography is an art, too."

There's one sour note—the treatment of the critic John Ruskin, an early supporter of Turner's and a great man in his own right, who comes off as a petted, fatuous, self-important young exquisite. Turner humors him (Ruskin and his parents were buyers), says teasing things to his notoriously neglected wife at a dinner party, and snorts when he sees some delicate pre-Raphaelite pictures (influenced by Ruskin's writings) at the Royal Academy. The Ruskin portrayal is Leigh's way of putting down critics who reduce an artist's work to banal words. Yet Leigh, too, has had his share of appreciation by non-geniuses. I think I'll live. ♦

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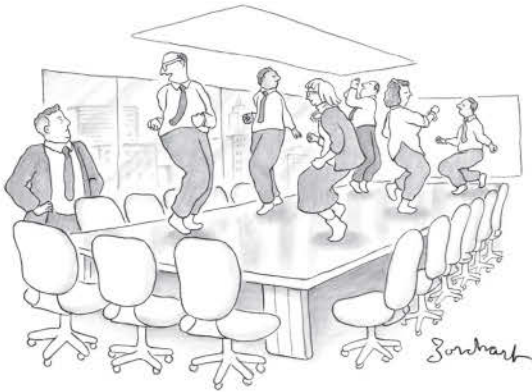
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by P. C. Vey, must be received by Sunday, December 7th. The finalists in the November 24th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 22nd & 29th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THE WINNING CAPTION



*"We're tabling the motion."
Patti Smart, Chicago, Ill.*



THE FINALISTS

*"I take it you don't share the same bed."
Kiho Cha, Brooklyn, N.Y.*

*"Can you meet him halfway?"
Delaney Turner, Ottawa, Ont.*

*"He was my first client."
Richard Kinnier, Tempe, Ariz.*

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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